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OR, Sandy Andy's Life Run.

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AUTHOR OF "SANDY ANDY," "LARIAT LIL,"
"COLORADO KATE," "THREE JOOLY PARDS,"
"LITTLE AH SIN," "LITTLE JINGO,"
"LITTLE SHOO-FLY," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A POINT OF HONOR.

THE atmosphere in the officers' quarters, at Camp Seaton, in the Black Hills, was in a very sulphurous state.

Major Pollard was pacing the floor in a greatly disturbed frame of mind, giving vent to his sentiments with more freedom than ceremony.

The Hon. Charles Caxton leaned against the window frame, with folded arms, looking stead

THE HOUNDS, WITHOUT A SOUND, CROUCHED LOW! HASTILY JIM FORREST INTERPOSED, IN A BARKING, AUTHORITY TONE. "NONE OF THAT, MAJOR, OR YOU ARE A DEAD MAN!"

fastly out into the parade-ground in front of the quarters, only occasionally turning his head, when some unusually severe stricture on the part of the major called for a pointed reply.

Before the quarters, were two highly-polished field-pieces, and two pyramids of solid shot, flanking a flag-staff, the halyards of which kept slatting the mast.

The night was very dark, and the Hon. Charles could see nothing out of doors, save where a bar of light from some window fell athwart the breech of one of the brass cannons and the lower part of the flag-staff.

But he was so occupied with what was going on indoors, that he did not notice even the little thus revealed.

A fair specimen of a young Englishman, with both hair and whiskers parted down the middle, he was dressed in gray, and wore checked gaiter-tops, to match his pantaloons.

Major Pollard was of soldierly build, with the self-important air not uncommon among officers in "the Reguar Army, oh!"

Just now, his dignity, like his person, was in fatigue dress.

"A fine state of things you have got us into!" he growled, irritably rattling the keys in his pockets, as he stamped up and down.

"A state of things for which, I beg you to consider, I am not altogether responsible," pleaded the Hon. Charles, in extenuation.

"Oh, circumstances, of course! But the ugliest circumstance of all is of your own making."

"I beg your pardon! The ugliest circumstance, as I estimate things, is one which I have been vainly endeavoring to avert."

With a scowl and a suppressed oath, Major Pollard caught up a paper-knife that lay on his writing-table, and threw it at, rather than upon the pen-rack.

"Caxton," he cried, "there is no use in mincing matters. Led by you, I find myself in a position which no man of honor, no gentleman, could get into, not to say continue in."

"Do you mean to insinuate, sir, that I am not a man of honor, that I am no gentleman?"

Now the Hon. Charles turned his face, darkened by a frown of slumberous wrath, indoors.

Whatever else he might be, he was no coward, and he had an Englishman's sensitiveness as to his reputation.

"Hugh!"

Major Pollard uttered the contemptuous ejaculation with a shrug, so careless that he did not take the trouble to look at the man whose tone was a challenge.

"You and I will not quarrel," he said, "at any rate, not yet. And if circumstances force it upon us, we will not bandy words about it. For the present, here are the facts of the case, and you can construe them as you please."

"Is it necessary to canvass the matter?"

"It will not hurt to see just where we stand."

"Go ahead, if it amuses you."

The Hon. Charles turned again to the window and the darkness which formed a fit background for his gloomy thoughts, and Major Pollard began his statement of the situation.

"Six weeks since, a lady came to spend her summer at this fort. She found you here as my guest, and both of us interested, with others, in a mining property to be worked by the hydraulic process.

"You were kind enough, according to your profession, to conceive a sentiment for her which met with my approval; but the event showed that she favored our mining superintendent, of which, I am free to say, I most cordially disapproved.

"My solution of this problem, was to call him out and shoot him, as became a gentleman and soldier!

"I was dissuaded by you. Such a course, you argued, would alienate the lady, and so defeat your hopes.

"Your solution was intrigue. You would reduce him to poverty, and overwhelm him with infamy. The lady would then turn from him of her own accord, and find refuge in your arms.

"To this end, you took advantage of the hostility of a ruffian whose insolence the superintendent had reproved, and through your valet incited the villain to revenge.

"He blew up the dam, flooding the gorge, and leaving us with the agreeable recollection of a human being drowned by our machinations."

"Could this have been foreseen?" interposed the Hon. Charles, with a shudder. "It was no part of my—"

"It was the result of your method," interrupted the major.

In keeping with current opinion, a man killed thus indirectly left a very different impression on him from that of a man killed in a duel.

"This destruction of the works of the mine," continued the major, "brought financial ruin upon the superintendent.

"That you took advantage of the agitation of the stock market to enrich yourself, is one of the the savory incidents of your method.

"In this honorable bit of financiering, I deem it due to myself to say that I had no share."

The Hon. Charles gnawed his lips and quivered under this biting sarcasm, but made no reply.

"But that is not all," continued Major Pollard. "Not trusting to your valet, but attending to this more delicate matter in person, you enlisted the road-agent, Corvette, in your interests.

According to his agreement with you, he seized the superintendent, and then exposed him to recapture by my soldiers, with the appearance of having joined this band of outlaws to retrieve his fortunes.

"He lies now in yonder guard-house awaiting his trial as a road-agent.

"In this honorable enterprise, I blush to say that I am a co-partner with you!"

"Why, hang it all!" cried the Hon. Charles, stung at last out of his self-possession, "if you don't like it, turn him loose!"

"Ah! it is very easy now to say 'turn him loose!' Why don't you say 'shift the mantle of infamy from his shoulders to your own?' I have no alternative, save to go on in this honorable course, or to change places with him.

"If the latter step is impossible, I must say that the former is growing more and more intolerable to me, the nearer I come to its shameful execution."

"It's a pity," sneered the Hon. Charles, quivering with suppressed wrath, "that your conscience was not sufficiently tender to forestall all this."

"Would to Heaven I had listened to my own instincts!" groaned the major, with a heartiness that left nothing to be added.

Then silence fell between them, during which one paced the room a prey to the stings, not of genuine remorse, but of wounded vanity, while the other stared blindly out into the darkness, cursing the fortune that had brought him to this wretched pass.

Never before had he had such words flung into his teeth, and yet he felt debarred from exacting the amends due among gentlemen.

"Pollard," he said, at last, "if you are sick of this thing—and I confess that I have no particular relish for it either—why not compromise it?"

"Compromise it!" repeated the major, as if the mere suggestion were preposterous.

"I should think you could make easy terms with a man who knew that his neck was in a halter."

"That may depend somewhat on the man."

"This superintendent is pretty much like other men, I suppose. Offer him his liberty, if he will forego his idle presumption, and quit this part of the country."

Of course, it was the superintendent's love that the Englishman regarded as presumptuous.

"You don't know him," returned the major, bitterly. "He would laugh in my face!"

"Knowing that his only alternative is a shameful death? I think not. You could make it appear that he escaped without your connivance. All you want is a single soldier whom you can trust. Terry will look out for the rest. He has a positive genius for these things. I have proved him more than—"

The Hon. Charles bit his lip. In his earnestness he had gone further than he intended to. With the present strained relations between him and Major Pollard, there was no use in taking that gentleman unnecessarily into his confidence.

Major Pollard had flung himself into his chair planted his elbows on the table, and dropped his face into his hands.

He did not answer all at once, but after a severe struggle with himself, sprung up, and declared desperately:

"I'll try it! It is the only way. As much as I hate him, I am not quite ready to resort to deliberate murder. Shall we have your famous plotter in here, and see what he can do for us?"

"As you please."

The major struck a bell impatiently.

After a moment's delay, the door opened, and an orderly saluted.

Without looking up, the major gave his order.

"Mr. Caxton wishes his valet. Fetch him."

CHAPTER II.

A HANDY HENCHMAN.

SILENTLY and stiffly the orderly saluted, turned and went out, closing the door behind him.

Then the proud soldier, in view of the code of gentlemanly honor to which his profession is supposed to conform, was suddenly overwhelmed by a sense of shame.

"Am I fallen to such a level?" he cried within himself. "To intrigue with menials! Great God! this is humiliation!"

Crimson to the roots of his hair, he turned to his confederate in crime.

"Must I take part in this? You know the man. He may feel freer alone with you."

But the after suggestion was too plainly a subterfuge. In the first cry the man's heart had spoken.

The Hon. Charles now perceived the significance of all this, and the hot blood mounted to his temples.

"Ah! he is too fine to consort with the tools we have to employ, but the dirty work fitly falls to my share! Well, I think I will convince him that he who dances must pay the piper!"

So much in his throbbing brain, then aloud:

"Terry isn't so modest as you imagine. He will not be nicer about association with you than you are about association with him."

For a moment the two men crossed lances with the eye.

There could be no mistake as to the meaning of either.

So rogues go about like dynamiters with bombs in their pockets. An explosion is ever impending on the slightest jar.

The major yielded to the cold steel of sarcasm of the Englishman.

The door opened, the orderly saluted, and an Irishman stood in the presence of "his betters."

As humble as was his position, he had a native shrewdness which, in connection with the knowledge of the world he had picked up in the service of his master, enabled him to read men with great readiness and accuracy.

While in the act of bowing, his eye passed but once between the faces of the gentlemen who commanded his attendance, and he knew them by heart.

"Terry," said the Hon. Charles, in the most off-hand, matter-of-course tone, "Major Pollard has a trifle of business with you."

The major started at this cool shifting of the matter to his shoulders, but a glance at the Hon. Charles's unperturbed face showed that nothing was to be gained by a conflict with him just at this point.

"I hope to merit yer Honor's confidence," said Terry Flynn, bowing again to the major, with no betrayal of his appreciation of the situation, in tone or bearing.

"Flynn," burst forth the officer, his desperation revealed in his affectation of easy familiarity, which was altogether unnatural to him, "I am heartily sick of this rascality, and I look to your skilled training in matters of this kind to get me cleverly out of it."

The Hon. Charles, who was looking unconcernedly out of the window again, smiled bitterly at this fling.

Would the time ever come when the bad blood now breeding between Major Pollard and him would find an outlet on the field of honor?"

That possibility caused the quiver of not a single nerve in his well-regulated body.

"Such small abilities as I may have, are entirely at yer Honor's service, wid the sanction o' me mather," was Terry Flynn's placing of himself at the disposal of his master's host.

"I hope to effect a compromise with this fellow Blake," pursued the major. "If I succeed, can an escape be managed which will bear a reasonable investigation—one conducted by ourselves?"

Terry thought a moment.

"Yer Honor probably knows yer own soldiers," he suggested, finally. "Somebody will have to go to the gaird-house fur such a slip, at anny rate."

"But I do not wish it to appear that any one has been bribed. Give it the look of negligence, if you like."

"That av course, sor. The sintry has been imposed on, so he has; but who the rascal is behind the doo-ur, divil a wan can find out at all, at all."

"But the sintry, sor. Have yez ary wan ye kin thrust?"

But just here was the most formidable feature in the scheme. Major Pollard knew nothing about his soldiers save that they obeyed orders. As to the accessibility to a bribe of any one of them, he had never dreamed of trying to ascertain.

And must hestoop to put himself in the power

of one of these fellows, whom he had hitherto looked upon as only so many machines, to do his bidding?

"I know of none such," he declared, at last, in gloomy desperation.

"Good heavens!" he burst forth, to the Hon. Charles in fact, though in appearance to Terry, "for what reason should I inform myself of the relative rascality of the knaves I have under me? All of my record, up to this accursed business, is open to inspection."

"Well, sor," answered Terry, not at all disturbed by feelings that had no direct bearing on the case, "min are min, the worruld over, an' ye have only to know how to pick them out, to whatever ye're wantin'. If you say the worruld, I'll putt me hond an two o' them that'll do yer bidding, av yez make it an object to thim. They'd as l'ave sit in the gaird-house fur money, as chafe in the saddle."

Still the major hesitated. Finally he asked: "Cannot you arrange this without compromising me? I will make it an object to you."

"Sure, we'll not quarrel about that, yer Honor. It's no doubt I have of yer ginerosity. Well, sor, a little money goes a great ways wid some min, an' the soldiers like Misther Blake right well. The best o' thim would sthretch a point to save his neck, I'm thinking."

At this mark of popularity, even when in disgrace, Major Pollard frowned.

"Arrange it," he said, shortly. "As for money, help yourself."

And turning the key in his table drawer, he put its contents at Terry Flynn's disposal.

"There is one thing more," he went on—"a horse. And let it be a fleet one. We shall have to pursue him with some show of spirit."

"They're are horses in plenty," declared Terry. "It's only the matther o' picking out the best in the lot."

"Do you know of one that can be relied on?"

"Surely! I was raised among horses in the ould country, and I can put me hond an the best you have here."

"Take him, and welcome."

"Go to bed aisy, sor. In the morning ye can make all the row ye like."

With that, Terry supplied himself with funds, and went out.

But two men were necessary for his purpose—the sentry at the guard-house, and the one at the gate.

Terry was a great favorite with all the men. His rollicking songs and merry jokes made him welcome to the mess-room whenever he cared to present himself.

The barracks were across the parade-ground from the officers' quarters, and thither he betook himself.

It was no task to learn who was to relieve the guards at these points at midnight, and he was soon alone with one of them.

"Sure, it's the devil's own shame to spoil a broth of a boy like Sandy Andy, wid a bit o' rope or a taste o' lead, the way they're proposing," was the feeler he threw out, when he had brought the conversation round to this subject.

"Well," cried the soldier, "they may say what they like, but to my notion, thar ain't a better feller unhung than this same Sandy Andy!"

"Thru fur you, mon dear! Ye niver spoke a better word than that. An' be the same token, thayre's a d'ale o' thim that 'u'd loike nothing better than to see him out o' dirty wather."

"I would, fur one."

"And I fur another! Bejabers! I like money as well as the next wan, but I'd give a few months' wages to any wan that 'u'd give him a lift out o' that."

"I'd go without tobacco fur the rest o' the year myself, to git him off."

"Whist, mon dear! What's the r'ason some o' you gay bucks couldn't take forty winks wan o' these foin avenin's, and—"

"Be shot in the morning? Oh, yes! that's fine, that is!"

"Shot, is it? Divil a wan o' yez! Faith, I'm thinkin' the major wouldn't be sorry to be well rid of him, if it could be done widout his havin' a hand in it. What were they but the illigant friinds, so they were, before this b'astely mine business? Who but him was in wid them all, aven to the beautiful lady herself. Troth, man, one don't give one's friinds to the hangman wid an 'asy conscience, all because of a thrifle o' misfortune."

"So you call road-agentin' a thrifle, in Ireland?"

"In Ireland is it! Faith, if we were in Ireland, the b'ys would 'a' had him out o' this in

no toime! Thayre's whayre a good fellah has friinds that stand by him in a pinch. Is it a taste o' the gaird-house that 'u'd kape the like o' them from giving him the wink, and good luck along wid 'um? Not thim!"

"I'd go to the guard-house myself, if that would do him any good."

"Would ye, now? Well! well! you're the boy I took yez fur. But whin one sits in the gaird-house, it's a comfort to have a bit o' pleasant r'ading at hand. How's that, me boy?"

And, with a wink, Terry exhibited some of Uncle Sam's most interesting literature—not "yellow-covered," but green-back.

"Eh! What?"

"Whist, man! You're as fond o' r'ading as anny o' them."

"But what is it to you whether Sandy Andy gits off?"

The sudden drop in the soldier's voice, to a confidential whisper, was all that Terry Flynn needed.

"Say no more!" he responded. "It's a tinder heart I have. And it's all arranged but fur you. Thayre! count it at yer leisure, and if it ain't enough, let me know in the morning."

"But, hold on! There's the watch at the gate."

"Whist, man! Here's somebody. Kape still, will yez?"

Terry knew how to play upon the man's rascality, and get him committed almost before he knew that he wanted to yield. Once in, and assured that others were in with him, there was little likelihood of his letting go his grip on the bribe.

The sentry was managed in much the same way, with such modifications as his individual peculiarities required, and that part of the business was assured.

The horses were grazing beyond the walls of the little stockade, and inside of an hour Terry had slipped off his choice from under the very noses of the herders.

But here it appeared as if his zeal were out-running the requirements of his employers, for instead of taking but one horse, he took two.

And thereby hangs a tale!

CHAPTER III.

A MORAL CONQUEST.

"AND NOW," said Major Pollard, when Terry Flynn had left the room on his mission of bribery, "comes another agreeable step in this vile business."

"It is my experience," returned the Hon. Charles, "that one who is on the lookout for only the sweet things of life will probably be disappointed most of the time."

"How am I to approach this fellow?" asked the major, waiving the discussion.

"A simple matter, I should think. Open the door, and let him walk out."

"To make such a proposition is to confess my complicity in the scheme to ruin him."

"He probably is in no doubt as to the real state of the case, anyway. Then what difference does it make to you, so long as he cannot prove it?"

"To some it would make little or no difference."

The Hon. Charles was so stung by this thrust that he retorted, with biting sarcasm:

"To be—to seem!"

Without a word Major Pollard abruptly left the room, and took his way across the parade-ground to the guard-house.

He was shown into the cell where his captive was confined, and left there with a lantern sitting on the floor.

With his ankles in irons, Sandy Andy sat on the edge of a wooden bunk.

No man ever looked more out of place in such a predicament. He might be a prisoner of State, but surely this was no felon.

Slight in build, his body was of those harmonious proportions that give agility and endurance. A clear, healthy mind looked out of his frank blue eyes. His hair was red, but one would not have had it otherwise. It harmonized with his eyes and his clear complexion. His features were so good that anything went well with them. He was one of those people whom we accept with satisfaction, whatever our previous tastes as to details in their make-up.

He had been sitting in the darkness with his eyes on the floor, deep in melancholy meditation.

Death had no terrors for him, though life in his case had been unusually full. He had enjoyed good health and good friends.

But just as his cup was brimming over, it had been dashed from his lips.

There in the darkness and solitude of his cell he had been going over the past few weeks, that had proved the brightest as well as the blackest in his experience.

He had met Amabel Pollard in a stage-coach, and learned of her destination and her relationship to the commanding officer at Camp Seaton.

He had loved her on sight, and if she did not return the sentiment then, the conquest of her heart was not long delayed.

Her brother's opposition he had accepted as a foregone conclusion. What was he, to aspire to the hand of such a woman? A mining superintendent, with his fortune yet to make!

The rivalry of the Hon. Charles Caxton had not troubled him much. There had been no coquetry on the part of Amy Pollard, and from the first Andy had believed that with her a man counted for just what he was in himself.

Then had come the plot, and his entanglement in its meshes. And now he was here, with everything pointing to his guilt as a captured outlaw.

Would she believe it? But when he was shot or hanged, how could her faith hold out, knowing as she did that it rested on nothing but her love?

When Major Pollard entered, Sandy Andy fixed a pair of accusing eyes upon his face, and from that time never removed them during the interview.

The major flushed under this scrutiny, but stood with folded arms and unwavering gaze, as if challenging the impeachment of his honor.

"Well?" he said, at last.

"It is you who have sought this interview," returned Andy. "To what purpose?"

"I have come to say that the possibility of such a meeting as this is to me unexpected."

Major Pollard enunciated this lie with unwavering steadiness.

Sandy Andy regarded him without the quivering of an eyelash, though he felt a moral certainty that he knew what that declaration cost him.

"Well," he said, "the meeting an accomplished fact, what then?"

"I will add that it is the most distasteful encounter of my life."

"I can well believe that."

For the life of him, Sandy Andy could not forbear this indirect accusation.

As the light from the lantern dimly illuminated the major's face from below, Andy saw the quiver of a nostril.

This was the only indication that his shot had gone home.

"I have come with a proposition," said the major, in a dull, monotonous tone.

"A proposition?" repeated Andy.

"You cannot believe that I would find satisfaction in your execution on an infamous charge. Our relations in the past go for something."

"Let us bury the past. It is dead. It can never be revived."

"There are features of it that I would not have revived. At the same time, I would not link with it memories that can never be laid."

"Why are you here?" asked Andy, with a sudden impatience to get at the point.

"I come to offer you life—and liberty."

"With honor?"

"You can begin anew, and make such a position as you choose."

"Life! liberty!" repeated Sandy Andy, going back to what had been offered. "At what price?"

"That you go from here, and never look behind you. You understand?"

This had evidently cost the speaker a severe struggle.

"Yes," replied Andy, "I understand. I regret—No! I say, without regret, that I cannot accept your terms."

"What!" cried the major, drawing his breath deep.

"Life and liberty are not worth to me the price you exact," said Andy, firmly.

"Reflect," pleaded the major, involuntarily taking a step forward. "You have nothing to gain by persistence."

"You forget," interrupted Andy, as if prolonging the interview was distasteful to him. "I shall not make myself a party to this infamous proceeding. All may be lost but honor, yet I would not exchange with the man who lives with the memory of this business."

This was said steadily, with no bitter intonation.

Major Pollard paled, and bit his lip.

"Listen," he said. "I have a humiliating allusion to make."

"Spare yourself," interposed Andy.

"I cannot, and at the same time spare another."

Now for the first time Sandy Andy betrayed a trace of emotion.

He winced.

"Nothing can come of this," he said, with almost harsh abruptness. "Let us proceed no further."

"I shall say what I have set myself to say," persisted the major, "and leave the rest with you."

"Make it as brief as you can," pleaded Andy.

"I make my appeal in behalf of one for whom you have professed a regard which should constrain you to the utmost consideration. There are wounds that we can hide from the world, but open shame—"

"Enough!" cried Sandy Andy, flinging out his hand with a gesture of wrathful repudiation, and starting as if to rise to his feet.

His breast swelled, his eyes flashed, and his nostrils quivered, with intense indignation, but he recovered himself as quickly, and replied:

"For centuries, perhaps ever since men were men, reputation has been harped upon, until honor has come to be almost synonymous with the opinion of the world. It is time that stress were laid upon character—the man as he knows himself to be. Why should I forfeit the right to self-esteem, in order to spare one the shame of having seen me humiliated before the world? No, sir! If this is to be my fate, I bow to it—without a murmur, as you can testify."

Never was a more trenchant accusation than those few last quiet words. They pierced to the very core of the being of the guilty man at whom they were directed.

If Sandy Andy had charged him openly, he might have found relief in anger; but his forbearance made it impossible to reply to him.

Well did the plotter know why his victim curbed his tongue. He magnanimously refrained from branding her brother with an infamous charge.

Major Pollard strove to reply, but the words died on his lips. He saw that to prolong this interview were useless, and turning without another word, left the guard-house.

Sandy Andy, the conqueror in this passage at arms, dropped his face in his hands and groaned aloud.

Yet he was not so profoundly shaken as was the man who staggered across the parade-ground, and into the presence of his waiting confederate, and flung himself into a chair, dropping his face upon his arms as they lay on the table.

"You have failed!" said the Hon. Charles.

"Failed!" repeated the discomfited major, lifting his head in a burst of fury. "I have been trampled in the dirt!"

"Let the fool hang!"

"Oh, he will hang!" groaned the major, with ineffable bitterness—"without a word!"

"So much the better for us."

But Major Pollard did not so easily settle with his vanity—for that it was, and not conscience, that troubled him.

"No! no!" he cried, leaping to his feet. "I will call him out! I will force him to fight me! We will stand with the length of his cell between us!"

He was about to rush from the room, but his confederate seized him.

"Are you mad? What folly is this?"

"Folly!" cried the major, struggling to free himself. "Am I in a position to split hairs about propriety?"

"You are in position to make a fine scandal. What interpretation will the world put upon this? Are you ambitious to be drummed out of the army?"

This was the touchstone. Always his place in the eyes of the world.

The man of vanity yielded with a groan.

"The thing is up. The fellow must run his course. We have given him a chance. He rejects it, and brings death upon himself. I will go and stop Terry."

And the Hon. Charles set out to find his handy henchman.

The midnight change of the guard was in progress when he found him.

"All right," said Terry, with no apparent concern in the change of plan.

"But the guards will have to be notified," suggested the Hon. Charles.

"Of what?" asked Terry. "If nothing happens, they will have nothing to do—that's all."

Sure, we needn't bother about a prisoner who don't want to run away."

To the Hon. Charles Caxton this answer of his henchman seemed satisfactory, and he returned to his agitated confederate and reported that all was right.

Then he betook himself to bed, with, however, several "night-caps" to steady his nerves.

Major Pollard threw himself upon his cot—for he lived with soldier-like simplicity—to toss the night through, the picture of a man haunted by an uneasy conscience.

Had they but known!

CHAPTER IV.

LOVE AND LIBERTY.

It not infrequently happens that the man knows the master much better than the master knows the man, because, while the man finds his master an interesting and often profitable study, the master generally disdains to return the compliment, though it might sometimes be to his advantage.

It never occurred to Charles Caxton that Terry Flynn—faithful Terry, on whom he relied in every emergency—could ever be anything but the instrument of his will.

For years Terry had done his master's bidding like an automaton. Unmoved, he had seen women weep their hearts out. Like a peg in the wall, he had held his master's cloak while he shot to death a hot-headed boy—all in keeping with the code of honor. He had taken a gray-haired man, wrought to frenzy by his wrongs, and put him out of the house by the shoulders, to spare his master the annoyance of reproaches.

But after the subsidence of the water that had swept the gulch in which the Black Hills Hydraulic Mining Company had its works, Terry Flynn had stood over the corpse of a drowned miner, and seen the sand in his dark hair and blue-glazed eyes.

This was the first death outside of the sanction of society in which Terry had had any concern, and here he drew the line.

Now, it was altogether without reason that Terry should go further than the clearing of his own skirts required, and interfere on his own account in the fate of Sandy Andy, when he had had nothing to do with bringing him into his present strait.

But the feelings of most men are unreasonable, and Terry Flynn's feelings prompted him to do something as an offset to his complicity in the death of the miner.

Even before his master had placed him at the disposal of Major Pollard, and the major in turn had sought his aid in effecting the prisoner's escape, Terry had been meditating this very same thing.

Now, the major's plan having failed, Terry resolved to relieve his own conscience, even at the expense of his master's interests.

Appearing to accept the situation, he only fell back upon a plan which he had matured and intended to carry into execution independently.

It was late to make this change in his plans, but everything else was in readiness, and he resolved to strike while the iron was hot.

He had no sooner got the Hon. Charles in bed, than he repaired to his own quarters, and there carefully wrote out a forged pass, in such close imitation of Major Pollard's hand that almost any one would be deceived by it.

That he had at hand pens, ink and paper surreptitiously taken from the major's writing-table, showed that he had already made preparation for this course of action.

He then wrote a note in pencil, concluding by rolling the paper on which it was written around the pencil, so as to make it into a compact cylinder.

Thus equipped, he returned to the officers' quarters, to knock softly at a door in a barrack adjoining that in which the major himself and his English guest lodged.

Under this roof was the officers' mess-room, with the kitchen and cook's quarters in the rear, and two chambers in front, one of which was occupied by Miss Amy Pollard, the other untenanted.

Since the tragedy in which her lover had narrowly escaped the fate of one of his men, Amy Pollard had lengthened the misery of her days through the creeping hours of sleepless nights.

She chanced to be sleeping when Terry Flynn's knock came at her door, but its evident stealth roused her with a start.

She sat up and listened, trembling with apprehension.

Terry heard her move, and putting his lips to the keyhole, warned her to silence with a low:

"H'sh-sh-sh!"

In a moment she was out of bed, had thrown on a dressing-gown, and crept to the door.

"Who's there? What is wanted?" she whispered through it.

For answer, Terry thrust the note he had prepared through the keyhole.

He waited while she struck a light and read it. He heard her low ejaculation of alarm. Then he heard the rustle of her garments as she hastily dressed herself.

When this was done, she opened the door and bade him enter.

He went into the room, so dark that he could not see her, and she closed the door behind him.

"Now," she said, in a low, guarded voice, "what is the meaning of this? Tell me everything, and tell me quickly."

"Ye're a brave lady, so ye are, or ye'd not be after admitting me the like o' this; but I have come to test all yer courage, and yer devotion to the man I am trying to save. Gaird yer voice, whatever I may say to you. A loud word may ruin everything."

"You may trust me. Go on."

With that introduction, he told her everything.

Her stormy indignation, when she learned that her lover lay in irons, terrified him.

She had her brother's passionate nature, refined, but almost as headlong. She had his sense of personal honor, too, but spiritualized.

She had never loved this brother of hers with any great warmth of affection, chiefly through his own fault. But she had admired him, had honored him, had been proud of him. Now she seemed crushed with humiliation in his fall.

Trembling with anxiety lest she should break away and wage open warfare in Sandy Andy's defense, Terry urged the hopelessness of any course save that which he had come to propose.

"You don't know the spirit o' Mither Blake," he argued, "if ye b'lave he'll go ag'in' yer brother. What would thayre be to it but a duel, an' wan o' them dead? D'ye b'lave he'd be breakin' yer heart that way? Not he! If ye'd bring a dozen witnesses ag'in' the major, Sandy Andy 'u'd give them all the lie, an' swear he had joined Corvett's band all squayre."

"Now, miss, av ye're ready to give up all the worruld fur 'um, an' ye'll go to 'um an' tell 'um that, ye may persuade 'um to fly wid yez to happiness an' safety. Other than that, he'll go to the gallows widout a whimper. I know the like of 'um!"

The woman's heart conquered all else.

"Give up the world for him!"

The thought inspired her, and Terry left her to prepare for instant flight, while he arranged for her admittance to her lover in his cell.

"She'll give yez an order from the major himself," said Terry, to the trembling guard.

"Of course, in the morning they'll swear it's a forgery, but that's nothing to you. You stick to it that the pass is all you know about, an' you're all right."

"What's a bit of a tap on the head?" he continued, referring to another part of the plot. "Who but me has tipped a shillaly many a time in ould Ireland, an' faith I'll go light on yez. It's only the maik ye're wantin' to show. Troth! it's a green-back plashter that's the great pain-killer."

A few minutes later, Amy Pollard, trembling so that she could scarcely sustain herself, entered the darkened cell of her lover.

No eye saw them clasped in each other's embrace; no ear but theirs heard what passed between them. Whatever the arguments she brought to bear, they conquered every scruple.

He consented to let her sacrifice the world for only his love. After all, it was but the opinion of men, and if they succeeded in escaping, they would have each other, and the smiling sunlight of God, and the consciousness that no real stain of dishonor attached to either of them.

What more could they ask than that! To live, to love, to respect each other!

Sandy Andy went forth a free man. His guard and the sentry at the gate lay stunned, bound, and gagged.

Out in the darkness Sandy Andy, in the saddle, pressed the hand of a man whose face he could not see, and in a low tone assured him of his forgiveness for his share in the wickedness of the past few days.

Then another whispered:

"God bless you!"

And Terry Flynn stood alone, listening to the receding footfalls of two horses walked cautiously away.

He did not hear their quickened pace, till they were cleaving the night like the flight of arrows. He crept back to the fort, and went to bed, but not to sleep. The hazard of the morrow was too great for that.

CHAPTER V.

THE BIRD FLOWN.

"MAJOR POLLARD! Major Pollard! arouse! *Sacre bleu!* we are undone! Our prisoner has escaped! Ah! this is disgrace unutterable! If it shall appear that I—I, Jules Beaupere, am at fault, I will go out and shoot myself! Major! Major! for the love of God, arise!"

This distracted summons, in English distorted with a very marked Gallic accent, was supplemented with a continuous pounding on the door of the commander's bedroom.

Just before daybreak Major Pollard had sunk into an exhausted stupor, which only added the horrors of nightmare to the misery of wakefulness.

So impetuous was the summons, that he leaped out of bed with a feeling of alarm altogether unwarranted by the announcement that Sandy Andy had escaped.

He opened the door to an excited little Frenchman, familiarly known as the Little Sergeant.

There was a comical contrast between the earnestness of the little man and his flannikin dress, for he was something of a dandy, and doted on the ladies.

Besides a ruffled night-shirt and a night-cap suggestive of tobogganing, he was arrayed in a pair of jack-boots and his trowsers, which he held together at the waist-band with one hand, his suspenders slapping his heels, while he carried a naked sword in the other.

Immense mustaches and imperial gave him the appearance of having borrowed these facial ornaments from some six-foot grenadier.

"What is it, Beaupere?" cried the major, by this time sufficiently recovered to act his part.

"Court-marshal me, my commander!" cried the little Frenchman, with humid eyes. "Ah, ciel! I am disgraced forever!"

"Come to the point! What has happened?"

"Our prisoner has escaped. He is in league with the Evil One—it cannot be otherwise. How else could he bind and gag my guards. You should see them! Poor fellows, I weep for them."

"Our prisoner gone? Blake, do you mean?" asked the major, with affected bewilderment.

"We had but one—alas! that one no longer!"

"But how—how?" cried the major, in seeming anger. "Beaupere, this is criminal negligence."

"Let your just wrath fall upon my head, my commander. My poor boys, they would have died at their posts. But they were betrayed, overpowered. A blow in the dark. Ah, he is a terrible fellow, this red-haired devil."

"Mount a squad of men, and set out in immediate pursuit. If you have been guilty of negligence, here is a chance to mitigate your offense. Fetch him back to me, dead or alive."

"I stake my head on his recovery."

And with that the Frenchman ran off to execute the orders laid upon him, while Major Pollard returned to dress.

Now, all this frantic protestation must be taken with a very liberal allowance of salt. The fact was, that Jules Beaupere heartily liked Sandy Andy. At any time he would have done more for him than for "his commander."

The moment he was free from observation, he rubbed his hands gleefully.

"Well, well, this is better than promotion! A dashing fellow is free once more, and we shall not break the heart of Ma'mselle."

These considerations were enough to reconcile the Frenchman to any miscarriage of justice. Chivalry and love—all must yield to them.

Only the uninteresting criminal is to be punished, rather because he bores one, than because he has injured his victim.

Allons, messieurs! What is it to be relieved of a trifle of sordid pelf, if it is done in a romantic manner?

Only a churl talks of hanging a brigand who would be fascinating in an opera.

So, though he believed that Sandy Andy had really turned road-agent, the Little Sergeant was glad of his escape.

At the same time, he would strain every effort to recapture him, and bear him no more ill-will than before.

This was the game of life. This was what gave zest to existence.

Meanwhile, Major Pollard had roused the Hon. Charles.

"He has changed his mind. He has relieved us of his unwelcome person, after all."

"And this is the upshot of your heroic estimate of him," laughed the Hon. Charles, in good humor because he felt more relieved than he would have confessed. "I thought that his fine scruples would yield."

He summoned his valet, and while he congratulated him on the outcome of the matter, Terry's face was as inscrutable as if he were not in momentary expectation of a tremendous explosion.

"It's lucky you didn't tell the guards that the thing was off," said the Hon. Charles. "His change of mind wouldn't have served him, but for that accident."

"Such things will happen," answered Terry, going about his work with his usual composure.

"But I don't see how he managed it alone."

"He is a shrewd fellow, an' a bold. Sure, thayre's no counting what the like of him may do at a pinch."

"Well, I'm glad he proved so fertile of resource. Good luck to him, at least till he gets out of reach of his pursuers."

They were already on his track, explaining in the most obvious way his having taken an extra horse.

"He is determined to give us a good chase, my children," said the Little Sergeant to his men. "He will have a change of horses, and the best at that."

Meanwhile Major Pollard was ready for his breakfast.

The austerities of military life were relieved by the presence of ladies. The camp surgeon and Lieutenant Culpepper were both Benedicts, and it was the presence of their wives that made Camp Seaton a suitable place for the commander's sister.

"Is not Miss Pollard out yet?" asked the major, of the maid in attendance on the breakfast table.

"I haven't seen her, sir."

"Will you please to say to her that we are waiting?"

The maid presently returned with the report: "I knocked, sir, but she didn't answer, and the door is locked. She wasn't feeling very well last night, sir."

This last was said by way of excuse for Amy's tardiness.

The maid knew that Major Pollard was so strict a disciplinarian that he was annoyed at being kept waiting by any one on any occasion.

With a frown only slightly tempered by the requirements of politeness, Major Pollard strode from the mess-room to his sister's door, and knocking, called:

"Amy!"

There was no response, and a moment later he made a discovery which had escaped the notice of the maid—that the key was on the outside.

Of course, then, the room was untenanted.

It was not an unusual thing for his sister to go out for an early morning ride, and at another time he might have dismissed the matter here.

But, as he was turning away, there flashed through his mind the thought of Amy being out on horseback at the same time that Sandy Andy was making his escape.

With a quick leap of the heart, he turned, opened the door, and looked into the room.

Everything was in confusion.

He knew his sister's scrupulously neat habits. This disarray indicated a hasty departure. He knew at the first glance, as well as he ever did, that she was gone, and gone with her lover!

For a moment he stood like a man turned to stone.

Then, without a word, without a sound, he wheeled, and strode back into the mess-room.

Some change in his tread, now like iron, drew every eye toward him as he approached. Every one started at sight of his white face, his frowning brow, his burning eyes, his quivering nostril, his hard-locked lips.

Passing all the others, his glance fell upon the Hon. Charles Caxton. It was a summons, as plain as words.

Caxton started forward, with a dread of impending calamity.

Forgetful of all ordinary rules of politeness, every one in the room followed him, as he hastened after Major Pollard, who had turned again in the doorway, and led the way to his sister's room.

He stopped and turned before the open door, with a wave of the hand that invited Caxton to look for himself.

The latter needed no explanation. His altered face showed that much.

"Come!" said the major.

Without a word further he turned and left the barrack for that in which he slept and transacted the business of his office.

Without a word to the dismayed women or wondering men, the Hon. Charles followed.

There was a long, breathless pause, and then Mrs. Dr. Duryea ejaculated:

"Well, I declare!"

CHAPTER VI.

A TICKLISH INVESTIGATION.

In the adjoining barrack Major Pollard faced his guest with a single word, as before:

"Well?"

"This is unaccountable!" cried the Hon. Charles.

"I have been betrayed—by somebody!"

"We have been betrayed by somebody."

Major Pollard shrugged his shoulders, waiving this distinction.

"What is to be done? Be quick!"

"We must summon Terry, at once."

The Hon. Charles turned, as if to call his servant, but the major struck his bell a single clang that had in it all the pent fury of his struggling soul.

The orderly entered, saluted, as mechanically as a figure in a cuckoo clock.

"Mr. Caxton's valet!"

The orderly saluted, turned on his heel, passed through the door, as if worked by a string. The storm that he saw brewing was nothing to him.

Terry was not hard to find. He entered with his usual quiet expectancy.

The eyes of his master, the eyes of this rigid martinet of whom every one stood in a certain fear, were upon him.

Not the quiver of a muscle, not the change of a shade in the color of his face, betrayed that he had anything to fear from the most penetrating scrutiny.

He acted his part even better than that. He looked inquiringly from one to the other, as if wondering at their steadfast gaze.

"What do you know of the escape of the prisoner of last night?" asked the major abruptly.

"I?" answered the valet, with only mild wonder. "Just what you know, sor. He knocked down his gairds an' walked out o' the place."

"He knocked down his guards?" repeated the major.

Terry glanced quickly at his master, as if to learn what this cross-examination meant, but the Hon. Charles remained impassive.

"I suppose he did, sor," continued the valet, looking back at his inquisitor. "At anny rate, somebody knocked them down."

"Well," he corrected himself, "to be downright nice about it, I don't know aven that. The min wor talking about it. Then, considering that I'd had something of a hand in the matter—wid your orders, sor—I went to Captain Beaupere. He was that excited, thayre was no getting annything out of him. Then I troyed to see the gaird, but they wor both under arrist; so I didn't get to see them at all, sor."

"How did the prisoner get out of his irons?" asked the major, as if he had scarcely listened to this wordy explanation.

"That I don't know, sor!" declared Terry, with a very honest opening of his eyes, considering.

"What plan had you formed for freeing him from them?"

"They wor to be filed off, sor."

"Did you give him the file?"

"Musther Blake, sor! I niver saw him, yer Honor."

"You have it still, then?"

"I gave it to the gaird, sor."

"A fine guard!" growled the major, with a dangerous lighting of the eye.

That glance said that there would be a man shot at sunrise on the following day.

"And this precious fellow was expected to release his prisoner with his own hand?"

"By your orders, sor."

Nothing could have been said more quietly than this, yet its effect was like a bolt of lightning from a clear sky.

The conscious blood swept to Major Pollard's temples, and then receded, leaving him as pale as death. Involuntarily he put out his hand to the table, to steady himself.

But his eyes did not waver. He stood perfectly mute, holding his breath while he regained command over himself.

"So!" he reflected, "my hands are fast in these invisible manacles, which are yet stronger than those that bound my prisoner. I dare not unmask this traitor! My God! to what a depth have I sunk!"

But there was another thought in his mind. With such facility in treachery, it was not difficult to suspect the good faith of his tool.

This is the weak link in the chain that binds evil-doers to one another. Honor among thieves, is a proverb in which nobody really believes—least of all, the thieves themselves.

With a few well-directed questions, the major drew from Terry the view of the situation which the Hon. Charles held—that, upon learning that the prisoner refused to avail himself of the opportunity offered him, Terry had dropped the matter without informing the guard.

Terry now urged the same consideration with which he had satisfied his master.

"Whin I supposed that you was only too anxious to be rid of him, whoy should I tell them to gaird him ag'in?"

Nothing could be franker than this same Terry, to all outward seeming. He was "an old hand!"

Abandoning the effort to catch him tripping, Major Pollard ordered the attendance of the guards.

Of course he could not examine these men in the presence of the valet, without making it clear to them that he was in collusion with the man who had bribed them.

Obviously, also, it was well not to have it appear that his guest was in his confidence where his own officers were excluded.

As the men were marched into the presence of their commander, Terry stood where they had to pass him, talking apparently to his master.

They looked at him appealingly, as if for some sign that the ordeal before them was in reality only a sham.

He looked significantly into their eyes, and ringing a piece of silver on the seat of a bench, said in a tone which would be full of meaning for one who understood, but void of especial intelligence to all others:

"It's all right, no matter how bad it looks. I'll stick to it."

Relieved, yet decidedly pale, the men passed on, and entered the headquarters of the commander.

Alone with them, Major Pollard began with the one who had guarded the outer gate.

"Tell me all you know of this escape, and look out that you pass over no details, no matter whether they seem to you important or not."

"Well, sir, I know nothing except that all of a sudden I knew nothing, an' when I come to, I laid there bound and gagged."

And no amount of cross-examination could move him from this declaration.

His fellow-prisoner wished that he had as simple a story to stick to, when he saw his comrade dismissed.

With a sinking heart he awaited his turn, alone with this man whom all feared.

"Now, sir!" said the major, simply, fixing his eyes upon the guard of the prison-door.

"Well, sir, I know but little more than my comrade. I was standin' at my post, when the lady come—"

"What lady?" burst forth the major, with such sharpness that the fellow jumped perceptibly.

"Stop!" he went on, changing his purpose. "You need not answer that question. Go on with your story in your own way."

"The lady gave me a pass, sir."

"A pass?" thundered the major.

The breach of discipline, the confession of which he saw was coming, made him forget the restrictions under which he was prosecuting this examination.

"It was all reg'lar, sir. I know your writin' better'n I do my own."

"Know my writing? What right have you to know my writing? And do you mean to tell me that, on your own responsibility, you considered a pass purporting to come from me?"

"I was for callin' Captain Beaupere, sir, all reg'lar; but the lady said she'd be in only a minute, an' she wouldn't break the captain's rest, an' it was all right, you knowin' of her comin', sir. An' bein's as it was your sis—"

With a furious stamp Major Pollard sprung to his feet.

The guard quailed before the lightnings of his eye, and turned sick with dread lest Terry had deceived him.

Could the major look like this, and yet be a consenting party to the whole thing?

Too late he recalled that Terry had not actually said that he was acting in the major's behalf.

"I'm a goner!" he said to himself. "They'll shoot me in the mornin', whether I give that liar away or not! He had only to salt my tail to catch me in his trap!"

But to his surprise the major suddenly cooled off, and sat down again.

"The lady showed you this pass," he said, picking up the thread of the guard's narrative so quietly, that the culprit began to fear this self-control more than he had feared his burst of anger.

"Give me the pass, sir!" he hastily interrupted. "You kin see yerself that it's your own."

"You have it?"

"I have, sir."

The guard made a movement with his hands to take the pass from his pocket, so excited that he forgot for the moment that he was in irons, and also another thing, which recurred to him, when it was too late, with the force of a thunderbolt.

"It is in your pocket?" asked the major, rising and advancing to take it.

The soldier's jaw dropped, and he turned as white as marble.

The file! It was there along with the pass! It must inevitably be found! He was a dead man!

Major Pollard did not at once interpret aright this look of wild dismay, but when he thrust his hand into the pocket, the backs of his fingers were rasped by a rough, metallic substance, the nature of which he had no difficulty in guessing.

He snatched out his hand with a start, himself turning pale.

"Hang me if he ain't in it!" cried the soldier to himself. "He was as anxious not to find that file as I was not to have him do it."

From that moment he regained a self-possession in too striking contrast with his former abject fear to escape Major Pollard's observation.

Indeed, under the cover of outward subordination, there was a masked swagger which henceforth his inquisitor felt as if it were a subtle essence in the air.

Major Pollard looked at the pass. It was a forgery beyond a doubt, but a very clever one.

Who could have written it? Whom could Amy have won to her interests, and employed in such business as this?

The major's face had been pale with rage and humiliation at the thought that he had betrayed himself to his subordinate, and that one more was added to the lengthening list of those who knew him as an intriguer.

But now, at this evidence of his sister's complicity in a forgery, he flushed crimson with shame.

He could not know that Amy had taken it for granted that the pass was genuine.

Of course the deception was the same, and it is therefore probably without very good reason that we feel differently about one's repelling wrong by strategy in which deliberate false statement is evaded. Self-deceived, we boggle at an ugly word, or at the particular form of an act, but glide over principles, excusing rather than justifying our course.

As for Amy's view of the matter, she had looked upon the pass only as a means of protecting the guard in the meritorious act of helping to prevent an outrage.

After a long pause the major looked up, and said:

"Go on."

"She went in, sir, an' that's all I know. I was knocked on the head like the sentinel at the gate, an' I never saw the hand that hit me."

"But your prisoner was in irons, was he not?"

"I believe he was, sir. That is, I heard the boys say so. I didn't see him myself."

"He was in irons. How did he get out?"

"I don't know, sir. I was tied up when the captain put me under arrest, and I never saw the inside o' the guard-house, where Mr. Blake was."

Nothing more could be got out of this man, and remanding him to prison, the major went himself to inspect the irons Sandy Andy had worn.

They had been unlocked!

So! Here was more treachery! Who had stolen the key, or possibly, made a duplicate?

Investigation at the quarters of the officer of the guard showed that the keys were all right.

"We have a burglar among us, as well as a forger!" was Major Pollard's conclusion.

That was a fact. Terry Flynn was a very handy man indeed—more so than even his master had suspected.

While this examination was going on, a word had passed between these two.

Gazing sharply into the eyes of his valet, the Hon. Charles demanded:

"Now, what is your account of this matter?"

Terry knew that there was no use in any disguise here. He did not attempt it. Returning the look unwaveringly, he answered:

"I have a tinder conscience, sor. Sure, you know that yerself. An' wan murdther is enough in one place—God forgive us all!"

The eyes of the inquisitor fell. His faithful henchman had betrayed him, and now defied him!

Then came the hurried formation of a new troop, at the head of which, accompanied by his guest, Major Pollard set out in pursuit of the fugitives.

CHAPTER VII.

OLD WEASEL-TOP.

SCARCELY an hour behind his subordinate, Major Pollard found the Little Sergeant engaged in picking up the trail where it had been broken.

"*Sacre bleu!*" cried the excitable Frenchman. "He is a veritable fox! Every time he doubles, he gains an hour upon us. Shall this continue, my commander? When he gets upon the difficult ground, we shall lose him altogether."

"Is this our only resource?" asked the major, fuming with impatience. "Every night will retard us, while he still keeps on."

"At night we shall need rest," suggested the Frenchman.

"Rest!" thundered Major Pollard. "I, for one, shall never rest, till I have my grip on the throat of that bound!"

"Hound!" repeated the Hon. Charles, catching at the word. "Suppose we had a brace of hounds?"

"The very thing—if we only had them, or could get them. It would enable us to use the night as well."

"If you will allow me, sir," interposed a soldier, touching his hat, "I know where a brace of hounds can be got. But they are fifty miles away."

"You do?" cried the major, whirling upon the speaker eagerly. "Fetch them to me, and I will remember the service, if you ever give me further cause to think of you in connection with promotion. What are fifty miles?"

"Nothing, sir, with the chance of being of service to you. But I shall need a better horse than this."

"Take your choice."

"There is one horse, sir, that far surpasses any other here."

"Point it out, and it is yours."

"I hope you will believe that I would not mention it, if the getting of the dogs here as soon as possible was not of more importance than anything else, just now."

"Do not heat about the bush! We are losing time. As you say, that is the only thing worth considering now. Which is the animal?"

The soldier looked doubtful as to the reception of his next words. Yet, though a trifle pale, said firmly:

"The horse you are riding, sir."

Major Pollard started and stared. His first impression was the presumption of this demand.

He looked at the man, and saw that he met his eye steadily.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"James Forrest, sir."

"Well, James Forrest, you know when the truest loyalty demands the height of assurance. I not only lend you this horse, but I give him to you, if you finish as you have begun."

"You are too kind, sir. I hope to merit your continued approval."

Officer and man exchanged horses without more ado, and with a wave of his hand, the soldier wheeled short round, and set off at a spanking gallop.

The morning was now well spent, yet at night-fall he drew rein at a hut in which his approach set up a furious uproar of barking dogs.

"Ho, Weasel-top!" he shouted, lustily.

Within the hut was heard the voice of a man, commanding:

"Down, my Lady! What be the matter with 'e, Sweet-lips! Behave yerself! Down, I say!"

The door opened, and in it appeared an old hunter, dressed from head to foot in furs, with a cap made of a weasel's pelt, with the head in front and the tail behind.

His skin was bronzed and begrimed to the color of mud, what there was of it to be seen between his brush-heap of whiskers and his beetling brows.

At his heels, looking past him on either side, were two huge bloodhounds, with hanging lips and grinning fangs.

"Waal, boyee! waal, boyee! what be 'e doin' hyar?" he demanded, querulously. "A dainty dandy you be, to be sure! A sodjer! Durn the sojers, sez I!"

"Hold on, Ole Weasel-top," laughed the soldier. "You haven't any reason to black-guard me. I don't owe you anything. But that ain't saying I haven't come for a loan, all the same. Wait till you hear what I'm after, and then you'll be sorry you wasted any breath blowing me up before I gave you cause. It will take all the abuse you can muster to settle your old gizzard, when I have roiled it up from the bottom."

"Loan? loan?" growled the old man, catching at the most obnoxious word. "All the loan I want, is fur you to clear out, an' leave me alone!"

"Well, you can't be half so anxious for me to get away as I am to go. But I've come prepared to squat right down on you, till you buy me off with what I want."

Swinging from the saddle, the young man coolly proceeded to ungirt his horse, as if for a long stay.

"What be 'e goin' to do? What be 'e goin' to do?" fretted Old Weasel-top.

"To put up with you, old man," answered the soldier, removing the bridle, throwing both over his shoulder, and entering the hut, without waiting for an invitation.

Indeed, if he had stopped for such a ceremony the prospect was that he would have been waiting till now!

The old hunter kept growling petulantly, as he made way before him with undisguised reluctance.

"I thought 'e was in sich a pucker fur to git away. What's to hender? I say, what's to hender? Not me! I ain't standin' in no man's way to do what he wants to do bad."

"I'll make tracks fast enough when I get what I'm after."

"'E won't git nothin' hyar—not a durn thing! No, 'e won't! What's hyar to git, I want to know? Time was when thar was high jinks in this hyar ole dug-out from mornin' till night. But them times is past an' gone! Yas, yas! them times is past an' gone!"

"Better times a-comin', old man."

"Better times a-comin'? Oh, yas—in New Jerusa-lum. Durn my old pelt, ef the world ain't a-comin' to an eend fast. Sodjers hither, an' sodjers yan. What's the good o' sodjers, sez I? Durn the sodjers, sez I!"

"But the Injuns would eat you up alive, old man, if it wasn't for us. You know that."

"The Injuns? Waal, the Injuns is a pesky lot, an' no mistake. But they're accordin' to natur', be Injuns. They don't skeer away no game. Thar's a power o' good in Injuns, sez I. But the sodjers—durn the sodjers! They comes trompin' around, eatin' ye out'n house an' home, an' skeerin' off the leetle game what's left. Durn the sodjers, sez I!"

"That reminds me. You never saw a hungrier soldier than I am in all your born days! Come, come, old fellow! what have you got to eat, anyhow? I've been saving up from 'way back. Hang such a shanty as this, I say, where a man can feel his ribs grind together, only to look in through the door! Starvation Camp is a pot-luck paradise to this! Set out everything you've got, and go out and get some more, while I'm sharpening up my appetite on the beggarly scraps you keep on hand, to scare off strangers who don't know your old stamping-ground."

"Be 'e goin' to drive me to dee-straction, boyee?" whined the old fellow, kicking the embers of his dyidg fire together. "That's a monst'ous maw you carry around with 'e. That's the sodjer! Durn the sodjers, sez I! Dee-stroyin' everythin' they kin git their paws on! Who ever heard of a sodjer takin' a pelt like a Christian? Durn the sodjers! durn 'em! durn 'em!"

Without ceremony young Forrest drew his bowie-knife and slashed a slice off a hanging hind-quarter of venison.

This he swung toward the hounds, crying: "Yep, my lady! Yep! yep! Sweet-lips! Give us some music, my beauties!"

The hounds "spoke for their supper" so uproariously as to drown their master's grumbling complaint:

"That's the sodjer! What they can't gormandize themselves they flings to the dogs!"

"Why, you old curmudgeon!" laughed Forrest, guessing at what he could not hear, "do you grudge a morsel to your best friends? If those princesses belonged to me, the wind wouldn't blow through their ribs as it does now; you bet your life it wouldn't!"

Old Weasel-top was not ill-pleased by this at-

tention to his favorites. Abuse him and praise his hounds, and, secretly, he loved you!

He did not abate his grumbling, but Jim Forrest knew what that was worth.

Between the two oceans there was not a more generous old growler than this same Old Weasel-top. But you had to give and take after his peculiar fashion before you got anything out of him.

In his secret heart he liked the soldiers. He liked their dash, their rollicking youth, their hot-headed, devil-may-care ways.

Nobody knew who had first found him out, but it was a trick of the boys to make a descent upon his larder whenever a party of them was in that neighborhood, and eat up everything he had in the house, blackguarding him all the time for not keeping a better supply on hand in expectation of callers.

Though alone, Jim Forrest fell to with a will, feeding himself and the dogs at the same time.

"We've got a new man," he said, between eating and broiling his meat over the coals.

"You never saw his like, and when he's had one crack at your skinflint commissary department, you'll never want to see his like again. He's six foot long and one foot wide when he sits down to the table, and he has nothing in him but emptiness. He keeps spreading and shortening up while he's at it, but nobody ever knew him to stop until he was called on duty. I give you fair warning, I mean to fetch him around with me next time. I wanted to bring him now, but I was hungry myself, and I knew that, in this orphan asylum, I wouldn't more than manage to skin through alone."

"What do 'e come gormandizin' around hyar fur, anyhow?" demanded Old Weasel-top. "You breed a famine wherever 'e set foot. Women an' children weep when they see 'e a-comin', an' grunTERS lay down in the empty trough an' give up the ghost after 'e's been thar."

"I?" cried the soldier. "Oh, I'm a fairy fed on dew-drops, compared with the new man. When he's passed by, there ain't a grunter left to give up the ghost."

"But if you want to know what I'm after, it's these beauties. I'm going to take them away with me. Hi, my Lady! What do you think of that? Will you go with me, Sweet-lips? Speak up, my beauty!"

"Them!" gasped Old Weasel-top.

But Jim Forrest paid him no heed, but kept on talking to the hounds.

"What do you get out of this stingy old fellow but hocks and horn-tips, with a promise of something good to-morrow? Now, what'll I feed you on? Man-meat, my dearies! How's that? Speak up! Is that what you've been waiting for till you've forgotten the taste of it?"

"Just look at their mouths water! Ha! ha! ha!"

The hounds, who liked Jim, responded to his calls upon them with music that did the old hunter's heart good.

"Man-meat?" he repeated. "What be 'e talkin' about, boyee?"

"A fellow has broke guard-house up at the camp, and I told Cap I'd come over here and get these little pets to follow him up with."

"A sodjer?" cried Old Weasel-top. "Durn sodjers, sez I! but I ain't makin' no dog-meat of 'em, howsomever. You go back an' tell your Cap as you didn't find Ole Weasel-top at home. Ef he's lookin' fur houn's fur to ketch his sodjers with, you tell him to call himself. But tell him thar's a spring gun layin' aroun' loose hyar, rammed to the muzzle wi' boss-shoe nails an' sich! I ain't sayin' as it'll be goin' off about the time he happens aroun' hyar, but I ain't sayin' the contrary, nuther!"

By the snap of Old Weasel-top's eye it was evident that this was meant, whatever might be said of much of the talk he indulged in.

"A deserter is a man to my likin'!" he went on. "Durn sodjers, sez I; an' durn sodjerin', sez he!"

"Who said it was a soldier?" demanded Forrest.

"You did."

"Not much, I didn't! I didn't say who or what he was, but now I'll tell you he's a road-agent."

"Road-agent! Waal, them's a pesky lot, fur sartin'!"

"Of course they are! That's why I came for my Lady and Sweet-lips. Road-agent meat is the daintiest kind. They never do any work to make them tough."

"That may be so, but I reckon wenison's good enough fur the pups."

"Oh, I told Cap that he needn't expect you to come down all at once. I said I'd come and

board with you a spell, and if that didn't do, he could send down the new man, and we'd hang on till you caved."

Old Weasel-top groaned.

"Do you mean it, boyee?"

"Of course I mean it."

"But the road-agent's a-gittin' funder an' funder away all the time. I reckon ef I keep you a few days, you won't have no call fur to take the pups."

"You can't get out of it in that way. The new man's to come down to-morrow, if they don't hear from me sooner."

"An' he's a bad one?"

"He's a blizzard where I'm a zephyr in June!"

"Do you reckon I'm hankerin' to have them pups shot?" cried the old man, with a seeming burst of rage.

"Shot!" echoed Forrest, knowing that the concession was now now close at hand. "I'd like to see the fellow who could shoot them in my care! We're to use them for trailing. When the game is treed, these darlings are barricaded behind the whole of Uncle Sam's army. Shoot one ear of 'em!"

"Ef 'e do, I'll never forgive 'e, boy!" whined the old man.

He went over to the hounds, and began to fondle them.

"Purty Lady! purty Lady! Air ye fur shakin' the old man, Sweet-lips? Thar! thar! that's human natur', and I reckon it's dog natur' too! This old beaver's mighty nigh home!"

With a profound sigh, he left them, and went and sat down with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands, gazing into the fire as if to avoid seeing them taken away.

Jim Forrest said not another word, but picked up his saddle and bridle, to leave the hut, calling the hounds after him.

They stood for a moment, looking from him to their master, and back again.

As Old Weasel-top did not change his position, one of them walked soberly up to him, and nudged him with his nose.

The old man paid no heed, and after a short delay further, both hounds walked slowly out of the hut, looking back at every step or two.

Jim Forrest closed the door, and then they seemed to consider themselves finally in his keeping.

When he was ready to mount, he tied two collars which they wore about the neck thongs of buckskin to serve as leashes.

He then leaped into the saddle, and without bidding Old Weasel-top good-by, dashed away at the top of his speed.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FUGITIVES.

WITH scarcely five hours' start of their pursuers, the fortunes of the fugitives depended not only on the fleetness and endurance of their horses, but also upon the endurance of the riders themselves.

Terry had done his part well, in the selection of the horses; Sandy Andy was a match for the best man among his enemies; but Amy was a woman,—an unusually sound and plucky one, but a woman nevertheless, with a woman's weakness.

It was on this that Major Pollard counted when he made preparations for a chase that might extend over days, or even weeks.

He had no thought of her eventual escape. He was fully resolved upon the death of her lover.

After, if the Hon. Charles still persisted in his suit, he determined to force her into the marriage. If the Englishman held his escapade a bar to her bearing the honor of his name, then she should find retirement in a convent.

There was too the problem of food.

Terry had had the thoughtfulness to supply them with a scant allowance of dried meat.

Sandy Andy had roughed it till he was competent to sustain life and vigor on such nourishment, but he knew that he could not rely wholly on it, for any great length of time, for one so unused to hardship as was Amy.

Turning these problems over in his mind, he rode steadily forward till just at daybreak, when he called a halt, and made Amy lie down in a blanket to rest, while he picketed the horses, and then left her with the assurance that he would not be long gone.

Knowing the importance of fostering her strength, Amy lay still, with her eyes closed, though she was far from experiencing any disposition to sleep.

She opened them when she heard his returning step, and saw him approaching with something held between his hands.

"What in the world have you there?" she asked. "Water? That is a primitive chalice." She smiled, affecting this lightness of spirits bravely, though her heart was heavy enough, save when it bounded with the thought that they were now all the world to each other.

What she had likened to a chalice was a receptacle of some sort, formed of leaves.

What was her surprise when, as she rose to a sitting posture, he held it down to her, so that she could look within.

"Berries!" she exclaimed, at the sight of the black, glossy fruit. "Oh, Andrew!"

She reached up her arms, and twined them about his neck, gazing into his eyes with her own swimming in tears.

"Why! why!" he ejaculated, kissing her tenderly. "Are you affected by so trifling an attention? You must expect these things—before marriage, you know!"

She made no reply, knowing that he understood her feelings. This was the beginning of his life-long care of her!

A moment later he said, more seriously:

"Try to repress every emotion save those of cheerfulness and hope. And love—Yes, you may love me as much as you wish. But we can't afford anything that is in the least degree depressing."

This was wise counsel, and Amy showed that she appreciated it.

Putting the past behind her, she began to plan for their future, with as much positiveness of tone as if it were perfectly assured.

Then Sandy Andy began to see that he had an altogether exceptional woman to second his efforts.

So fresh and glowing was her imagination, so full was her heart with hopes and plans which she had been forming while she grew into womanhood, that, in spite of their surroundings, Andy found that she was soothing his anxieties, and inspiring him with confidence in the future that he had not dared to entertain.

This, then, was the beginning of their flight. It continued through the day with only brief intervals of rest, in which the horses grazed, while Amy lay in her blanket.

As for Sandy Andy, he seemed tireless.

He appeared to think that he alone required no care. Having made Amy comfortable, he would remove the saddles and bridles, and rub down the horses.

He took only those measures to break his trail which would least retard his progress, seeking the ground where the faintest traces would be left, and riding in the bed of a shallow stream.

He knew of Old Weasel-top's hounds, and feared that they would be used against him.

"If I can keep ahead of them till a drenching rain washes out both trace and scent, that will be my hope," he said to himself.

Distance, then, was what would serve him best.

Amy bore up far better than his most sanguine hopes. She was a thorough horsewoman, and he spared her as much as possible.

But nothing could equal the dogged persistence of Major Pollard. At the close of the fourth day the fugitives looked back over their trail, across a wide stretch of country in view from the pinnacle of rock where they paused to reconnoitre, and saw on the far horizon a group of pigmies, like ants.

No words were necessary to explain this sight to Amy.

"Further flight was useless," she said, more wearily than she had allowed herself to appear hitherto. "In twenty-four hours more they will have overtaken us."

Sandy Andy believed that she was right, but he had resolved to leave no effort untried before abandoning the enterprise.

He knew what she did not—that surrender meant death to his body and her happiness.

"Twenty-four hours!" he repeated. "But what may not happen in twenty-four hours?"

"What may happen?" she asked.

"A rain, for one thing," he answered, looking up at the sky.

She followed his glance. There were indications of a gathering storm. It might burst before midnight.

"That will only add to our misery!" she protested, shrinking as if she felt that she could endure no more.

"And favor our escape," he urged. "It has been my one hope. If it had come three, or even two days ago, they would not now be there."

In response to her wondering look, he explained the effect of incapacitating the hounds.

"Hounds!" she cried, catching at the word. "You do not think that they have put hounds upon our track?"

"With the efforts we have made, I believe that they would not have gained upon us, without being able to follow day and night."

"Oh, Andrew!" cried Amy, in dismay. She recalled stories she had heard of men hunted with hounds, and reached out her arms to her lover in terror.

"You need not fear the dogs," he assured her. "There is no likelihood of their being allowed to attack us. They are used only to track us with."

"But if they should break away?"

"I could easily dispose of them."

"If there is hope in the storm, let us hasten on."

They fled once more, not pausing to rest as Andy had intended.

True to his prognostic, the storm came not far from midnight, sweeping the face of the earth with such blinding fury that he was compelled to dismount, and lead the horses, to avoid the danger of stumbling unaware into some death-trap.

Just before it burst upon them in its fury, Sandy Andy had Amy dismount, and wrapped her from head to foot in a double thickness of blankets.

Only her hands were free, not for the management of her horse, which he determined to undertake, but that she might cling to the saddle, if necessary, in the perils they were now about to enter upon.

In spite of this protection she was soon drenching wet, and the blankets weighed her down like lead, so that, by her request, he removed one of them, leaving the other for its warmth.

Then, bowing to the storm, she braced herself against the swirling blasts of wind and pelting rain, in miserable endurance.

CHAPTER IX.

A BRAVE STRUGGLE.

It was not long before the fugitives came to a mountain torrent, into the bed of which Andy turned, abandoning the bridle-path he had been following.

The water was scarcely more than ankle-deep at the outset, but in an hour it rose to his knees, and not long afterward its thigh-deep current threatened to sweep him off his feet.

Then came a point where the roar of the waters showed that the increased declivity made further advance still more perilous.

Waiting for a flash of lightning, Sandy Andy saw a rapid, well calculated to daunt the stoutest heart.

"I shall have to carry you over this place," he said, "so that in an emergency I shall not be incumbered with the horses. Will you trust me, dear?"

She had seen the swirling waters. They had filled her with dread. To attempt to pass through them seemed to court death.

There are accompaniments that make death more terrible one way than another. To be the sport of this muddy torrent, amid rocks that would bruise and disfigure, was a fate at which she shuddered.

"I suppose it would be impossible to walk round this one place?" she ventured.

"In this ground it would be impossible not to leave tracks, and once assured of the direction we have taken, our pursuers would regain all that I have sought to deprive them of."

"Let me have my arms a little freer," was her only stipulation, as she yielded her assent.

She put them about his neck as he lifted her from the saddle, and kissed him, with a feeling that it might be the last on earth.

He did not realize all that she threw into the scale of fortune, she did it so quietly.

Then, leaving the horses tied together, and having soothed them to encourage them to await his return, he began the descent.

Waiting for the flashes of lightning, he judged of the bottom by the swell of the water.

While he could see he would make for a certain point, and there hold his ground against the current till another flash came.

He had thus made perhaps half the distance, when he saw that the space to the next point of vantage was greater than any he had thus far attempted.

The blinding darkness which followed the lurid glare overtook him before he reached it.

Whether he failed to reach it, or the added pressure of his weight and resistance to the water was sufficient to dislodge it, he did not know, but there was a sudden slip and submergence, and he felt himself swept away by the tide.

He heard a faint cry of dismay from Amy, bravely resisted by all the force of her will, and felt the involuntary clutch of her arms, as they went under.

He felt a thrill of pain somewhere, whether in his arm or side he did not at once realize; then his feet struck the bottom, and he struggled upright.

"Are you hurt, my dear?" he inquired, instantly.

She was coughing with strangulation, but as soon as she got breath, she replied:

"Only a little frightened. I did not know that I was so great a coward. Only, I never learned to swim, you know."

He could not but laugh, as he kissed her and praised her courage.

"That is evident, or you would not count upon swimming in this little run. But you are a heroine if there ever was one, or you could not have answered so calmly after such a sudden ducking, not knowing how to swim, you know!"

"This is adding insult to injury!" cried Amy, trying to repress a shiver. "If you do that, I shall never trust you to take me through such a place again, sir!"

"Seriously," he responded, "I am afraid of the effect of such a cold bath on your health."

"Oh, I am no wetter now than before," she answered, affecting a lightness she was far from feeling.

"My darling! what I have brought you to!"

"This is only the beginning. The end will be all the sweeter by contrast."

The end! What was to be the end?

"Besides," she went on, "you are entirely overlooking yourself."

"It is nothing for me," he said. "I have been an amphibian all my life. But you, so sheltered till now."

"I prefer this shelter to any I have known!" she whispered in his ear.

He stood her on a rock, then turned to fight his way back against the current.

Unincumbered, he had the agility of a mountain goat. It was a desperate fight, but he regained the horses, and fondled and praised them for their faithful waiting.

The descent was made this time without accident, though two or three times the horses were so nearly swept from their feet that he was glad he had not risked it with Amy on the back of one of them.

Then he placed her again in the saddle, and resumed his course.

How far he went in this way he never knew. Day was breaking when he came to an impassable barrier in a waterfall which precipitated the torrent into a deep canyon.

It was necessary to retrace his steps, to find a suitable point at which to leave the stream.

After some search, he found a rocky bridle-path, and here chose his point of departure.

The storm still continued with unabated fury, and though this protracted Amy's distress, it was their one dependence in keeping their trail from the hounds.

Pale and blue-lipped, gaunt with privation and shivering with cold, Amy was a piteous spectacle. Yet she bore up against her accumulating miseries with a fortitude that made her lover's heart bleed.

The smile with which she tried to reassure him, as he fixed his sorrowful eyes upon her face, made her look even more woe-begone.

"Terry had the thoughtfulness to provide us with what is a blessing in the right place, though a sad curse in the wrong place. Unfortunately, it is most of the time out of place!"

And he presented a canteen of liquor for her to drink.

"Oh, but I never touched a drop in my life!" she protested.

"You are a 'teetotaler'?" he asked, smiling.

"Absolutely! I have always refused to drink even the lightest wines."

"So much the better. It will do you all the more good now. Investigations in the most trying situations prove that those men meet hardship best whose blood has not been poisoned by alcohol. Nevertheless, there are times when a temporary stimulation of the body will stave off illness and possible death. This is a crisis of that kind."

"Nothing is ever made the subject of controversy, without finding a plenty of people anxious to run it into the ground. I have heard of a person so zealous in the good cause of temperance as to die of rattlesnake poison, rather than take the only available remedy—all the whisky he could drink. The opium habit is even more terrible than drunkenness, yet, as it has not been so wrangled over, no one thinks of

sacrificing his life rather than take opium at a proper time and in a proper way.

"Come! we can't afford fanaticism here."

Feeling that this was the real gist of the matter, Amy drank the liquor according to his direction, but not without many a wry face, as the fiery stimulant took her breath.

It warmed her and cheered her wonderfully, its beneficial influence being all the more potent because it was an entire novelty in her system.

"But it will not do to place our whole dependence in this," said Sandy Andy. "At whatever risk of betrayal, I must find a house where you can dry your clothes, or we shall have you seriously ill. Nothing but an unusual soundness of constitution has preserved you so far."

"I was never sick a day in my life!" declared Amy, proudly.

They continued till nearly noon, when the sun came out bright and warm.

Then, being far from the point where they had last blinded their trail, and having failed to discover a house where Amy could have the care she so sorely needed, Sandy Andy resolved upon another plan.

"There is nothing for it but to allow your clothes to dry upon your person," he said. "I must protect you as far as possible from the ill effects of such a course."

Finding a spot where the sun beat so warm against the face of a cliff as to have already dried it, he wrung the water from the sodden blankets, and, by stretching them on the bushes, built a sort of wall-tent, open at the top, into which the sun streamed so as soon to make it as comfortable as a chimney corner.

In this retreat of entire seclusion, he instructed her to employ the time while he was away gathering berries for her repast, to disrobe, wring her garments as dry as possible, and rub her body thoroughly with the liquor, before resuming them.

He then left her.

Having first rubbed his horses as dry as he could, he set out on his quest, trusting to exercise to counteract the hardship of his own condition.

On each of the preceding days he had managed to shoot some sort of game, the broiled flesh of which was more grateful to Amy than the dried meat, which they had reserved for an emergency.

Such an emergency was now upon them. He was afraid that the sound of firearms or the smoke of a fire might betray them to their enemies. His only resource, therefore, was the natural fruit of the earth.

Fortune favored him, however, in the discovery of a sort of pond formed by the slack water of a mountain brook, in which, after a little search, he found some turtle's eggs.

Elated with his prize, he returned to the spot where he had left Amy, bearing eggs and berries.

Time enough had elapsed for her to have made herself as comfortable as circumstances would allow, but he paused at a little distance, and called to her.

There was no response.

He called again, louder than before.

Not a sound came from the direction of the tent.

What was it that filled him with sudden alarm, when he might have assumed that she was only asleep?

With a deathlike sinking of the heart, he sprang forward, tearing aside the blanket that inclosed the nook in which he had left her.

CHAPTER X.

THE LOST TRAIL.

It was daylight before the soldier with his hounds reached the spot where he had parted from his chief.

The pursuers had not waited for him. Major Pollard had been altogether too impatient for that. He had ordered the party forward, to make the most of the daylight by which they could follow the trail, leaving Forrest to overtake them as soon as he could.

That he might not be delayed following the somewhat devious course by which they had come, Sandy Andy having been determined in this choice by the character of the ground to be traversed, they at nightfall sent a soldier back to meet him, and bring him to this new point by the most direct route.

He reached the spot two or three hours before noon, but they had gone on, and it was dark when he finally overtook them.

Two days and a night had now elapsed since the chase began, and there was no way of determining whether any gain had been made on the fugitives.

Major Pollard had been fuming in futile rage, and was wrought to a frenzy of impatience by the sight of the hounds.

"At last! at last!" he cried. "Now there need be no more of these accursed delays. Let us put the animals on the trail at once."

But here Forrest demurred.

"If you will permit me to advise you, sir—and I have had some experience in these things; otherwise Old Weasel-top would probably not have intrusted his dogs to me—you will make reasonable provision for rest."

"Rest!" vociferated the major. "What have you been doing but rest since the day of enlistment?"

"For myself," replied Forrest, with quiet dignity, "I will only say that, if you will look at the condition of my horse, you must conclude, either that I have ridden ill, or that I have lost little time since I set out. But the hounds need rest. The chase must be a test of endurance, and two hours will be worth more to them now than twelve a day or two hence."

"But at any moment a rain-storm may destroy the scent irrecoverably."

"That is true. But that is a risk which cannot be evaded. Meanwhile, the hounds are the most valuable members of your party. Sacrifice your men if you choose—they can be replaced. But care for your hounds."

Major Pollard yielded, and for two hours Forrest and his charges slept undisturbed.

The rest of the party were glad of the chance to do likewise. Even the Hon. Charles succumbed.

Before he lay down, however, he sought to justify himself by urging upon his host the futility of wasting their strength needlessly.

Major Pollard turned away with impatience.

"Sleep if you are in the mood for it," he said. "I am not."

For half an hour he paced to and fro restlessly. Then he sat down, and fell to nodding in spite of himself. But such snatches of semi-unconsciousness as he got brought no refreshment. He was haunted by murderous dreams.

In this way the chase was continued two days longer, in which the persistent advance of the pursuers more than compensated for the superior speed of the fugitives.

On the third day Major Pollard found that his men began to straggle, in spite of his authority.

It was an easy matter to make it appear that the horses were at fault.

Then he hit upon the plan of appealing to their cupidity, offering rewards to those who were "in at the death," as he significantly expressed it.

This stimulated the men, but the outcome was that those who were best mounted set a pace that, in all truth, used up the poorer horses.

So it happened that fewer than half his party were with him just before nightfall on the fourth day, when Forrest shouted:

"There they are! There! there! Do you see them? Just against the sky, on that pinnacle of rock!"

"Where?" cried the major, straining his sight to catch a glimpse of the fugitives.

As he looked, he tugged at a field-glass which he carried, with such impatience that he was longer than usual in getting it out and adjusted.

The result was, that when he came to look, nothing was to be seen.

"You must have been deceived," he said, with annoyance. "The sun was in your eyes, and those two pines, standing a little apart from the others, look enough like people on horseback to be mistaken at this distance."

"I am confident that I saw moving objects. They are not there now," answered Forrest, in his quiet way.

"And there is a prospect of a storm," supplemented Caxton. "Let us hasten on, at any rate."

Everybody had looked with intense excitement, yet nobody but Forrest was satisfied that he had seen anything.

Therefore, the tired men responded with reluctance to this new demand on their endurance.

Major Pollard had the grace to allow them time for a brief repast, and then they set forward.

Darkness came down around them, but they kept on, led by the faithful hounds.

The trail indeed passed over the spot which Forrest had designated.

That fact fired the major with renewed impatience. He was nearing the end!

Then came the gathering storm. His rage at

this knew no bounds. If he had been a semi-barbarian of two thousand years ago, he would have shaken his fist and probably shot his arrows at the lowering sky.

But nature pays no heed to human purposes, good or evil. The storm rushed down upon pursuers as upon pursued. The hounds soon showed that their delicate sense of smell availed no further.

Then the baffled man-hunter stopped in voiceless rage.

"From here all is chance?"

The question was addressed to the soldier, Forrest. His superior had come to rely greatly upon his judgment.

"It seems to me that we can count upon but one thing with certainty," answered Forrest.

"And that?"

"That he will take advantage of this favorable chance to break his trail once more. He has displayed great skill, and greater judgment, so far."

"How so?"

"He must have known of these hounds, and proceeded on the chance of our getting them. He has blinded his trail so cleverly that he would have given us a great deal of trouble, if he did not put us entirely at fault, once or twice, but for the dogs; yet he has lost no time in doing it. Now he will spare no pains."

"We have his general direction. Cannot we take that as a guide, and pick him up again after this accursed storm?"

"That would do very well, if he does not change his course."

Major Pollard ground his teeth.

"At any rate," he said, fiercely, "here we stay until we have examined every inch of ground within a radius of a hundred miles, if necessary!"

"It will require daylight for it," remarked Forrest, quietly. "We might as well go into camp here, and wait."

There was nothing for it but this, and they made the best they could of the storm.

In the morning, they began anew. As soon as he came to the run down which Sandy Andy had gone, Forrest observed:

"Here is an excellent point of departure. He may have chosen this, or he may have gone on, leaving it to consume our time in fruitless search."

"Let us begin at the beginning," said the major. "At least, we shall not pass him."

"Up-stream, or down?" asked Forrest.

"Either. Whichever is the most likely."

"It is a game of the purest chance," answered Forrest. "He could discount our calculations, and then heed them, or not."

This was the beginning of a search that tried Major Pollard's patience more than all that had gone before.

Go which way they would, they found no trace, and the hounds only whined and ran about aimlessly. Ever they returned to this spot, until it seemed as if the disappointed man would gnaw his heart out.

Now came a new manifestation of his feelings.

He had treated the Hon. Charles cavalierly ever since the elopement, but now he evaded his eye, and spoke to him only in response to some address, till the Englishman ceased to make overtures.

Then there came an occasional glance that had deadly hatred in it.

Between Terry and his master the old relations had remained outwardly unbroken, though of course the Hon. Charles no longer placed the same blind reliance in his henchman.

He had accepted the situation more readily than Terry had expected. Neither by word nor look had he intimated the slightest displeasure.

Now he caught Terry observing him and the major, and could not forbear sounding him on the subject.

"Well?" he asked, simply.

"It means fight, sor," replied Terry, as if the other had stated his thought definitely.

"I suppose so," answered the Hon. Charles, with a peculiar light appearing in his eyes.

"Well, that will be like old times, won't it?"

"He's not ready fur it yet," observed Terry. "Wait till he gives up, beat. Then he'll be after taking it out o' you, sor."

The Hon. Charles laughed, and lighted a cigar.

"There is but one more of these, is there not?" he asked.

"Only wan more, sor."

"We'll save that for a special occasion."

The quietness with which this was spoken gave it its significance.

"As you please, sor," answered Terry, as indifferently.

"Confound him! he'd see me laid by the heels as coolly as he has looked upon specimens of my handiwork," said the Hon. Charles to himself.

And this was doubtless true.

Meanwhile Major Pollard gnawed the bitter cud of discontent till the report of fire-arms was followed by shouts of exultation, and far away among the mountain peaks two straight columns of smoke announced that the trail had been found again.

Then into the saddle and away, helter-skelter.

CHAPTER XI.

FRIENDS IN NEED.

For one terrible moment Sandy Andy believed that his enemies had stolen a march on him—had found his retreat in his absence, and robbed him of his prize.

The spectacle he saw but substituted one agonizing dread for another.

Amy was there, but she lay on the rock in her sodden garments, for all the world like one dead—drowned.

She rested on her side. Her wet hair had escaped from its confinement, and now lay across her neck, and upon her emaciated cheek. Her bloodless lips were apart, and her eyes but imperfectly closed.

The canteen of liquor lay beside her, evidently unused as yet.

With a great cry of fear, Sandy Andy threw himself on his knees beside her, and caught her up in his arms, believing that she was dead.

There are moments when the terror and agony of a whole lifetime are crowded into an instant.

"Amy! Amy, my darling!" he cried.

She opened her eyes with a start, and threw her arms about his neck in fear.

"Oh, Andrew! What is the matter?" she panted. "They have come!"

But he was covering her face and hair with delighted kisses.

"Matter," he repeated. "I have just passed from hell to heaven. Oh, dear one, I thought you were dead, you looked so wan! How can I ever forgive myself for bringing such suffering upon you? I am not worth a tenth of the sacrifice! Would to heaven I were, that I might repay you."

But she was well content, and gave him every evidence of it.

"I must have fallen asleep," she said, simply.

And this was true.

No sooner had Andy left her, than, the need to bide her exhaustion from him being temporarily removed, she had sunk down in utter helplessness.

She had thought only to rest a moment before carrying out his directions, but the sleep of complete prostration had overpowered her the instant her head had leaned against the rocky face of the cliff.

In such profound oblivion was she sunk, that it did not rouse her when she slipped from her sitting posture and lay prostrate.

Sandy Andy now realized how completely used-up she was, and how bravely she must have fought to hide the fact from him.

Even while, resting in his arms, with her head pillowed on his shoulder, she talked to him, her eyes closed involuntarily, and the words died upon her lips.

The warmth of the nook, the relaxation of her muscles, the sense of content in the shelter of his embrace, made sleep irresistible.

"This will not do, dear," he urged, rousing her before she had quite succumbed. "Make one more effort to give yourself such protection as is possible against your wet clothes. Then call me, when you have redressed. After that you can sleep with much less danger to your health."

"Ah! this is like paradise!" she sighed, struggling against the seductive drowsiness. "I am so warm, and everything is so restful."

But she roused herself determinedly, and he left her to take the precautions he had suggested.

He availed himself of this period of waiting to wring his own clothes as dry as he could, and when she presently called him, hastened back to her.

She was looking better already. It proved the elasticity of her constitution.

An instinctive love of beauty, which was not coquetry, appeared in her having rearranged her hair, and given to her dress a neatness of adjustment which excited her lover to wonder and admiration.

"Well! well!" he cried, "you have a positive genius for the toilet!"

"I have something better than that," she answered, a faint blush of pleasure at his praise flitting into and out of her cheeks.

"And what is that?"

"A presentiment of good—great good!"

"There is but one greatest good," he said, holding her close and gazing into the fond eyes she fixed upon his face.

"And that is to be ours," she declared, with conviction. "We are going to escape. Last night's struggle will not be lost."

"You shall be my prophetess!" he cried, kissing her.

"I am all in a glow—both inside and out!" she went on, smiling with a touch of her wonted humor. "But I am sleepy—oh, so terribly sleepy!"

"You don't know what we have for dinner, yet!" he said laughing.

"Let me sleep first—after you have told me what it is, of course."

Even at this moment she did not lose her appreciation of his labor of love for her.

Those few words—"after you have told me what it is, of course"—were a reward beyond price.

Then she sunk to sleep, with her head on his shoulder, and he laid her in a comfortable posture without rousing her, and hung one of the blankets so as to screen her from the direct rays of the sun, while they fell all about her, flooding the spot with warmth. And warmth is life.

At last he himself slept, and slept so soundly that then his enemies might have come upon him and bound him, like Samson of old.

But they were far away, chafing over an almost hopeless task.

For three hours Sandy Andy lay like a log. Not a muscle, save those employed in breathing, moved. Then from that profound sleep he rose, a new man.

It is of this stuff that men of great deeds, of physical prowess, are made.

He roused Amy so gently that she opened her eyes as calmly as if she had had her sleep out, which was far from the case.

"What you need," he said, "is twenty-four hours of unbroken slumber, and you would take it too, if I could spare you the time."

"But you?" she asked. "You have not sat here watching me!"

"If?" he laughed. "You wouldn't think so, if you could have seen me!"

"But, once asleep, how could you rouse yourself? You must be dreadfully tired."

"I own up to that human weakness. But waking when you want to, is a knack that one acquires quite readily when his life depends upon it."

"I think," she said, looking steadily at him, "that you are the most wonderful man I ever saw."

"You're a partial judge," he laughed, pinching her cheek. "But you'll find me commonplace enough when you get better acquainted with me. For one thing, I get hungry, like other mortals. How do you feel?"

"Ravenous!" she declared, laughing. "That isn't angelic, is it?"

"For my part," answered Andy, placing his frugal repast before her, "I prefer honest flesh and blood to spiritual essence, any day!"

So they found happiness even in the midst of miseries. It was enough, that they were together. Naturally cheerful dispositions, and an unselfish desire to cheer each other, did the rest.

The sun was half way down the sky when they resumed their flight.

Amy's head was aching, but she said nothing about it. When the night fell, she felt chilly, though Andy wrapped her in the blankets, now dry, with the greatest care.

They continued by the light of the moon till midnight. Then they rested again, sleeping till the early dawn.

As Jim Forrest had suggested, they had changed their course, and were now going northward, instead of westward, as before.

Two days more of brave effort, and Andy succumbed, her brow flushed, her pulses leaping, with fever.

Suspense, unremitted exertion, insufficient food in spite of all her lover could do, had done their work. She was going to be ill!

"Oh, my darling!" he cried, holding her in his arms.

"It is too much!" she murmured, resting her hot cheek against his, while her eyes closed wearily. "Let him come. He cannot separate us. I would sacrifice everything but our love, rather than tell him what I know of his—his

complicity— You know! But I will do even that, and then dare him to continue his persecution of you, at his peril! Nothing, I say, shall separate us! I will—bare—everything—to the world!"

Tears rained from her eyes. Her pride was crushed. This was the first time she had referred to her brother's dishonor, since, in his prison cell, she had told her lover that she knew all.

But Sandy Andy was not prepared thus to abandon the struggle.

He knew that what she had most to fear was not persistence in the plot against his life and honor, but a meeting between him and her brother which she would be powerless to avert.

He had fully made up his mind as to his course. He would flee as long as flight was possible. He would do everything in his power to secure the happiness he believed she would find in his love, even alienated from her brother. But, if he was taken in spite of all, he would go to his death at the hands of Major Pollard, firing his own weapon into the air.

If he was shut away from her, it should be by the grave!

It was plain that she was no longer fit for the saddle. Her head swam if only she stood on her feet.

Yet they could not stop here, in the heart of the wilderness.

Without proper care she would die, even if they were not overtaken.

Thus far Sandy Andy had carefully avoided meeting any one, but now his only hope was in human sympathy and aid.

With a sinking heart, he took her before him in the saddle, and bearing her tenderly in his arms, sought some human habitation.

A day of agony, a night of fear, and then he found a resting-place at last.

It was a log cabin—not a miner's hut, but a place that had the look of home about it, in spite of its desolate poverty.

There were signs of the presence of woman.

Never had Sandy Andy seen so welcome a face as that which appeared in the doorway of that wretched hovel, as he rode up, bearing his precious burden in his arms, and leading her horse by the bridle-rein.

It was that of a woman in middle life—a by-no-means handsome face; seamed with lines of care and hardship, sallow with unwholesome living, and bronzed with exposure.

But it was a woman's face; it was kindly; it was pitying.

"Waal, stranger, you're in a bad fix thar," was the greeting Sandy Andy heard more gladly than the most cultivated address he had ever listened to before.

"My good woman," he replied, "your kindness is my only hope!"

"Waal, you kin count on the best we got, an' that's a fact. I wish I could say more."

"Your sympathy will go further than anything else, perhaps."

"Pshaw! That don't cost nothin'; so we kin afford to keep it. Then we don't have much call fur it in these parts; so we've got a to'able stock on hand. Leave me take her, ef you please. I don't look like much. I'm a mite shook up wi' chills an' rheumatiz. But I pan out better'n I show up. I've got a heap o' work in me yit."

"Pore creetur!" She's a sight fur sore eyes, an' that's a fact."

Amy was now delirious. She smiled sweetly upon the rugged woman who received her from her lover's arms, and said:

"Ah, mammy! Is that you? I want some—some— Oh, I forget! I'm so tired!"

"Pore creetur! pore creetur!" repeated the woman. "Don't you worret, mister. This hyar ain't nothin'. I'm a power in yárbs, I be, ef I do say it as shouldn't. We'll pull her through so slick you'll say you never."

"How can I thank you?" cried Andy, leaping to the ground and seeking to receive again his darling, to bear her into the house.

"This mite!" cried the woman. "Go 'long, stranger! I've toted my own gal when she was this hyar way; an' she ain't no chicken, she ain't, 'long o' this'n. Pore creetur! she do look peaked, an' she feels a heap peaked'n she looks. I hope ye won't take it amiss, stranger, but when we turn her over to you ag'in, we'll have a mite more meat on her bones 'n she's got now."

"God help me!" cried Sandy Andy, his heart wrung by this evidence of his darling's suffering. "I have done the best I could!"

"Oh, leave you alone fur that," answered the woman, hastily. "I seen that much in yer face, or I wouldn't 'a' spoke so free. I ain't an in-quirin' turn o' mind, an' it ain't none o' my business what's got you in this hyar fix. But ef my

ole man was to look at me like you look at her, I'd know he was going fur to use me well."

"I hope you may never want for the tenderest care!" cried Andy. "Oh, be kind to her!—save her from this peril!—and I will never—"

"Say no more about it! That's a good idee. I'll trouble you to pull that thar curtain. That's Hanner's notion. The factory cost a heap—more'n I ever dreamed of whar I come from. But thar wa'n't no sich 'tarnal packin' of it acrost the everlastin' mountings, an' that's a fact. Hanner's more pertickler'n some, an' I don't discourage her in it. I like a well-behaved gal myself. So I tells my ole man, we hain't no call to make this rough life no rougher'n what it is a'ready."

They had entered the house, this rugged, yet tender woman bearing Amy with seeming ease.

It consisted of but four walls and a roof, yet it was divided into two apartments by a curtain of coarse unbleached muslin drawn across one end—such material as the miners used for the tents that sheltered many of them.

The main apartment, evidently used for all of the purposes of a dwelling—not only kitchen, parlor and hall, but chamber as well—contained a rude bunk bed, and behind the curtain Andy found another, so narrow that it was evidently intended for but one person.

It was dressed with coarse gray army blankets, but, to Andy's surprise, also with sheets, of the same material as the curtain.

The bedding was of mountain moss, and a pillow of the same was covered with a slip like the sheets.

What pleased Andy beyond everything else, was the fact that the neatness and order in this little retreat, showed that "Hanner," whatever else she might prove to be, was a person with at least one exceedingly commendable trait.

This impression was not lessened by the discovery of a little box, of the rudest construction, standing on the log which formed the window-sill, and containing a wild-flower.

If it had been the most exquisite exotic, Sandy Andy could not have admired it more.

"Ah, my darling is more fortunate than I dared to hope! This is a good augury."

To his hostess he said:

"I bless your Hannah already. The girl who has prepared this nest for herself will not feel that my darling is crowding her—"

"Waal, now, stranger, you've got a sweet mouth, an' that's a fact!" interrupted the woman, with a smile of keen satisfaction at this tribute to her daughter. "Crowdin' Hanner!" she went on, giving to Andy's word a slightly different meaning from that which it had as he spoke it. "Waal, now, I should smile ef you could crowd Hanner in this hyar way. Jest you wait till you git the chance fur to size her up. She's a gal, she is, I tell you!—one o' the kind ye read about."

"But don't often meet!" supplemented Andy, in the fullness of his heart. "I can well believe that."

"Waal, I dunno," answered the woman, as if not quite disposed to concur in this sweeping criticism. "Gals is gals. Thar's a power o' good in most of 'em, ef ye know how to take 'em. But thar's bad 'uns too, when they want to be. Some is born shif'less an' good-fur-nothin', an' some is spoiled by hard livin' an' rough usage. This hyar's a mighty tough world, stranger!"

"But there are kind-hearted people in it!" exclaimed Sandy Andy, gratefully.

Leaving Amy to the care of their new-found friend, he went out to care for the horses.

When he returned, he was told that she had been put to bed, and was sleeping.

"Not but she's a mite restless," admitted Mrs. Saunders, for such, he learned, was his hostess's name. "but ye must cal'late on that fer a day or two. But we'll pull her through. Don't you worret."

"How long before she will be able to go on?" asked Andy, fearful of the verdict.

"Waal, she won't want to see no more o' the saddle inside of a week or ten days, an' that's a fact."

"A week or ten days!" cried Andy, in dismay.

"Why, d'ye cal'late she's made o' iron?" exclaimed Mrs. Saunders, looking at him with a more doubtful expression than at any time before.

"My poor darling!" he answered, with feeling enough to reassure her. "But such a delay will be fatal. All that we have struggled for will be lost!"

"I don't know about that," was the reply. "But human natur' is human natur', an' ef you don't want to bury her, you've got to give her a show."

Then Andy unbosomed himself without reservation, telling the woman everything, from the beginning.

This proved to be the wisest thing he could have done. She at once espoused his cause with all her heart, and he had already proved that, rough as was her exterior, it was a great and a warm one.

"Waal, we'll do our level best to head off them scalawags," she declared. "An' when me an' my ole man, an' Hanner an' the Kid, all takes bolt, somethin' ginerally has to come away!"

She arose at once, and taking a shot-gun down from the wall, went out before the hut and fired the barrels into the air in rapid succession.

CHAPTER XII.

"HANNER."

HAVING fired this signal, Mrs. Saunders re-entered the house without further concern.

Sandy Andy listened till he heard three shots at intervals, from as many different directions.

After the lapse of perhaps five minutes, he saw a man carrying a rifle in one hand, speeding toward the house at a dead run, his face expressive of lively anxiety.

"When they hear two shots, that's fur 'em to come a-runnin', an' they gen'ally make purty tol'able time," explained Mrs. Saunders.

She stepped to the door so that the man could see that she was in no distress, and when, having slowed down considerably, he came within ear-shot, called to him:

"That's all right, Bill."

"What's the row, Murriar?" he asked, as he came up, glancing inquiringly at the visitor.

"This hyar gent, an' the puttiest lady you ever see, is in trouble, an' us bound fur to see 'em through," declared Mrs. Saunders, with the air of one whose word was generally accepted as law.

"You bet that's jest whar we live," said Saunders to Sandy Andy, with a readiness and heartiness that could not be mistaken.

"I am fortunate indeed," replied Andy, grasping the horny hand of the borderman. "Your kindness is only equaled by my need. How can I sufficiently thank you?"

"Don't ondertake it, stranger. We hain't got much, but ef the ole woman says it belongs to you, you better believe thar ain't nobody around hyar what'll gainsay her. She's putty level-headed, an' ginerally knows what she's a-talkin' about."

At this point there was a new-comer on the scene—a boy, as much like his father as their difference of years would permit.

He had scarcely reached the house when a girl—evidently "Hanner"—made her appearance, out of breath, but looking as if she had the stamina for a great deal more than a five-minutes' run.

Like her father and brother, she was armed with a rifle. Like theirs, too, her face was covered with freckles.

But she had an eye beaming with intelligence and good-nature, which softened into kindly sympathy when she saw Amy.

Sandy Andy had to repeat the story of their wrongs and sufferings, while old-man Saunders sat with his hat on the back of his head, and his rifle between his knees, his hopeful son the while shifting his weight from one foot to the other, and sniffing, and rubbing his nose on the sleeve of his "bickory" shirt.

Hanner kept breaking into the story with sympathetic or indignant ejaculations, to rise at its conclusion with flashing eyes and a look of determination that was a guaranty of as whole-souled partisanship as any one could desire.

"Them's Ole Weasel-top's houn's!" she declared. "To think that that ole scalawag would let them out fur to hunt a dear, sweet creeper like this'n! I'll go fur him, or my name ain't Hanner Saunders!"

"The thing fur to do fu'st," suggested old-man Saunders, scratching his head reflectively, "is to git shet o' this hyar cap'n an' his gang."

"They'll never cross that thar threshold!" declared Mrs. Saunders, belligerently.

"Ye'll will is good, ole woman," said her husband, bobbing his head repeatedly in her direction, "but this hyar ain't no fort, an' I reckon the sojers would make short meter of it, ef they 'lowed as what they was after was inside."

"But she can't stir out o' this, Bill, nobow ye kin fix it."

"An' she won't stir!" declared Hannah.

The Kid looked as if he felt called upon to add something to this family demonstration, but was at a loss just how to strengthen the position; so he compromised the matter, with a sniff and a change of base.

"Waal, I dunno," replied the old man, rubbing his chin as if he were scratching over a brush-heap. "Leastways, I reckon we won't bother no trouble tell we find out whether the sodjers has picked up that thar trail or not."

"Kid, you go back to them thar sheep, you do, an' you keep yer weather eye peeled fur ary thing what comes acrost the flat."

"They can't git in on us without the heft of an hour to spare, stranger, ef they come by the trail you've chalked down. Then, to-night we have a full moon from sun-down to sun-up, so we fetch 'em thar."

"I reckon," running his eye over Sandy Andy's drooping person, "it won't do you no hurt to turn in an' take a quiet pull at a snooze fur yerself. Thar's the t'other bed. I wish we had better to offer ye."

"Oh, but I can't turn you out of house and home like this!" cried Andy. "I owe you what I can never repay already, for your kindness to me—"

"Hum! I reckon you're proud, or you're tryin' to make my ole woman an' me hoppin' mad!" interrupted old-man Saunders. "When we say as this hyar dug-out, what thar is of it, belongs to you, we mean it, an' we want ye to use it as ef it was your own. Don't you go to raisin' no rumpus now, or hang me ef I don't go an' call in the sodjers on ye!"

He rose, as if with indignation, adding:

"When it comes time fur you to pile out o' hyar, we'll stand ye on yer feet, but you jest put in the time fur all ye're worth tell we do call ye."

Sandy Andy seized the hand of his kindly host, but could not find words to express his gratitude.

Five minutes later he was oblivious to everything in this world—its joys and its sorrows, its hopes and its disappointments.

From that time he never moved till a hand was placed on his shoulder.

Then he leaped erect at once.

"They are coming!" was his instant ejaculation, as he lost no time in preparing to get out of bed.

"Waal, not jest at the present writin'," answered old-man Saunders.

Sandy Andy looked about. The sun was shining brightly.

"Why did you call me?" he asked.

"So soon?" chuckled the old man, completing his thought.

"Yes. It isn't sunset yet."

"Hyuh! hyuh! hyuh!" laughed the old fellow, with huge relish. "It's putty consid'able arter sun-up, stranger! You've got a mite turned round in the pints o' the compass."

"It is morning?" cried Andy, in amazement.

"Waal, you've put in fifteen or sixteen of about as solid hours as I ever see. That orfer fetch us around to putty nigh mornin', oughtn't it?"

"Sixteen hours! I don't seem to have more than just shut my eyes."

"But you feel a mite better, I reckon?"

"I feel several mites hungry!"

"I 'lowed as a bite or two wouldn't do you no hurt, so I took the liberty to jostle you. We will fill you up, an' let you go at it ag'in, tell you git caught up."

"But, Miss Pollard?" asked Andy, who, though he had said nothing about her thus far, had been looking at the curtain from the outset, and straining his ears to get some sound from her.

"Waal, now, it'u'd do yer heart good jest fur to look at the way she's a-puttin' in her time!" declared old-man Saunders, rubbing his hands and grinning with as lively enjoyment as if he were the recipient of some rare good fortune. "I hain't seen her myself," he added, with an air as if this were in confidence, "but the ole woman jest shows her eye-teeth whar she lets on about it. She's out, gittin' barbs, now; an' Hanner, she an' the Kid's on the watch. Ye needn't be oneasy, stranger, with them two on the watch. Peeled onions ain't nothin' to the eye they carry in their heads."

"But that thar ole woman o' mine," he went on, as if this was the theme which it warmed the cockles of his heart to enlarge upon, "she's a power in the land, an' no mistake! Knock fever? Hanner! Waal, ye may believe me, he wan't nowhar. She's knocked that thar fever higher'n yan mountin' a'ready! But your leetle woman's peakeder'n peaked, an' this hyar's took her whar she lives."

"Now! now! don't you go to kickin' up no muss about it. I tell ye, ye needn't look so skeery. Ain't my ole woman after her with a sharp stick? I'll—"

"Bill Saunders, you'd do to run a graveyard."

you would," declared the voice of his wife at his back, as she entered the door. "But you oughtn't to be turned loose along o' no livin' folks what's in trouble."

"Don't you hark to him, mister. When he gits a chance to wag that thar jaw o' his'n, thar ain't no tellin' whar he'll fotch up. Your sweet lady is all right, an' you kin see fur yerself, ef you don't believe me."

Sandy Andy believed her, but at the same time he was not averse to seeing for himself.

He went on tip-toe, and stood at the bedside of his darling.

She lay as wan as any lily, sleeping peacefully. His heart swelled with gratitude to their kind entertainers, as he saw how neat everything had been made about her.

Her wet hair had been carefully combed out and dried, and now lay in a heavy braid across her shoulder. This had been Hannah's work—a labor of love and admiration.

Never had Amy looked more beautiful than now, in her helplessness. Her lover longed to kiss her, but feared to wake her, and so stole away.

When he had partaken of the food that was set before him, he went out to look after his horses.

Kid had taken care of them in a way that left nothing to be desired. This was his contribution, and heartier good-will never went with any service.

"Thar ain't much to Kid yit," remarked his father, when Sandy Andy expressed his appreciation of the care bestowed on his animals, "but he's a-comin' on. He's a drum-major with his knife an' fork, an' he puts the grub whar it does the most good. But ef ye want to see Kid shine, jest give him a show with hosses."

"This is all very kind," said Sandy Andy, with a sad, far-away look in his eyes, "but of what avail if they cannot be used? And, for the same reason, how useless to spend time in watching."

"Oh, they'll be used fast enough," declared old-man Saunders.

"And do you imagine," exclaimed Andy, "that I will go away and leave—"

"You won't do nothin' else, mister."

Andy started in surprise.

"Oh, it's all chalked down," insisted the old fellow. "Hanner, she's got that down fine, an' things mostly comes out about as Hanner says. She's the ole woman right cver ag'in, when she sets her foot down."

He laughed at Sandy Andy's perplexity, and added:

"What you're up to, is puttin' in all the time you kin between the blankets. When we turn you out we want ye to be feelin' an' lookin' chipper. Suppose you turn in ag'in now?"

Though he was curious to know what had been planned, Andy had to wait till he could canvas the subject with Hannah herself. The old man wouldn't take it upon himself to make or meddle in her affairs.

So, declining to go actually to bed again, Andy rolled himself in a blanket, and slept once more till near nightfall.

Then, declaring that he was his old self once more, he sat at the supper-table, and heard Miss Hannah's plans.

"That poor dear ain't goin' into no saddle fur some time to come," declared Hannah. "You leave her to ma, ef you know when she's well off! But thar's them scalawags a-comin' down on ye, sure enough, an' we've got to git away with them. Now, how be we goin' fur to do it? Why, jest this hyar way."

"When we sight 'em a-comin', pop he packs her off to a sheep snugery whar we've got, ag'in' the blowin' up o' blizzards. And thar's whar no hounds an' no sodjers ain't goin' to find her. Then I put on her things, if you please, an' she pleases, an' you an' me set out jest like it was you an' she."

"I don't 'low to be much on handsome, but I know a thing or two about hosses, an' I kin hold my own in the saddle ag'in' the best sodjer. Major Pollard has got in his ole slab fort! If he wants somethin' to chase, I'll lead him a dance that'll make his toes ache before he gits through with it."

"Them's good hosses o' yourn, and they're in good enough condition ag'in' to hold over any beast he kin fetch ag'in' 'em—I know that!"

"But, hark to me now! When we come back hyar—an' we will before many days are over our heads—thar won't be no hounds after us, an' you better believe it."

"Oh, Hanner's got the thing down fine!" declared old-man Saunders. "Jest you tie to Hanner, an' you'll come out right side-up-with-care!"

"Then, when your young lady is all right," continued Hannah, "you take her, an' go on your way rejoicin'!"

"Well!" cried Sandy Andy, with a swelling heart, "if you can bring all this to pass, I shall go on my way rejoicing beyond any gladness of my life, but with regret at parting with such true-hearted friends."

Then, when Amy awoke, and expressed her eagerness to see him, Andy went to her bedside, and kneeling, put his arms about her, and told her all that had been planned for their happiness.

"Didn't I tell you," she cried, "that a good omen had come to me? Oh, Andrew! we are going to succeed—I know we shall! And we shall owe everything to these kind people!"

"Don't you fear to have me leave you?" he asked.

"Oh, no!" she protested. "I shall feel quite safe—in my sheep-fold!"

She laughed archly, yet the way in which she shrunk closer in his arms belied her brave words and looks.

Suddenly she clasped him close and said:

"We must make provision for every contingency while we have the opportunity. Something unforeseen may happen, you know."

"What can we provide against?"

"If I should be discovered—you know, with all their care, it is possible—if I should be discovered, you are not to be troubled about it, or to do anything rash."

"If you should be discovered, and taken back!"

"I could not be taken back against my will," said Amy, with something of her wonted pride, "nor could I be detained. But I will go back, in order to stop the pursuit of you."

"And then? and then?" panted Andy, clinging to her.

"You must make good your escape, and I will meet you in San Francisco. That is what I wished to provide for. When I get there I will advertise, giving you a rendezvous. I will manage so that you will be exposed to not the slightest risk, whether my brother foregoes his opposition or not. Before taking a step, I will employ detectives, to ascertain whether I am being watched."

They arranged everything, and then Mrs. Saunders interposed, declaring that she would not have the strength of her patient further taxed.

Not far after midnight, Kid suddenly made his appearance, announcing the approach of the pursuers.

"They couldn't come in a time that 'ud suit us better," declared old-man Saunders. "We kin cover her all the closer, by foldin' the sheep in behind her. That'll look all right in the night-time."

It was an exciting time for Amy, roused from her sleep to meet this peril.

She was dressed in Hannah's garments, her own going to adorn the not ill-shaped figure of her benefactress. Then she was carefully wrapped in blankets, to guard against the damp night air.

Sandy Andy held her as if he would never let her go, but finally placed her in old-man Saunders' arms, with a parting injunction that was not at all called for.

Encouraging her with repeated assurances of her safety, the old fellow carried her a quarter of a mile from the house, and hid her in a niche in a dry cave in which his sheep were folded.

"Now, don't ye git skeered, a-conjurin' up things along o' yer bein' in hyar all by yerself," said the old fellow to the trembling girl. "Kid he lays right out hyar by the mouth o' the cave. An' this hyar ain't no cave at all. You kin see that yerself. It's only jest a hole in the hill. Thar can't nothin' happen to ye, not at all. Only, don't ye peep onc't, whether you hyear anybody talkin' out hyar or not. Jest you snuggle up, an' keep as quiet as a mouse, an' we'll come fur ye ag'in as quick as ever we kin."

Amy saw where Kid had his post, lying in his blanket at the mouth of the hole in the hill, to guard the sheep, and she held out her hand to him, as if his rough though kindly grip would establish a tie between them, so that she would not feel so lonesome.

Then they left her, and all was still, so that the disturbed sheep soon settled back to their contented repose.

The desolate girl was glad to have even them for company. So life clings to life!

Meanwhile, Sandy Andy and the brave and true-hearted Hannah were away, she even hiding her face behind Amy's veil, so that the cheat could not be discovered by any chance.

Then the pursuers came!

CHAPTER XIII.

A WARM RECEPTION.

THE recovery of the trail was accidental, in so far that it was hit upon after deliberate search for it had been abandoned.

Two days had been passed in fruitless efforts, and every one but Major Pollard was beginning to feel that his persistence was sheer obstinacy.

The men were grumbling, and carrying forward the search in a half-hearted way, every possible avenue, as they felt, having been followed out beyond all reason.

A party accompanied by one of the hounds was returning from a fruitless quest, shortening the distance by taking a bee-line as near as they could toward headquarters, when the animal suddenly stopped, with every manifestation of intense excitement.

It was found that they were crossing a trail, so discouraged that they would have passed it unaware, but for the animal.

To make assurance doubly sure, this hound was taken away, and the other brought.

No sooner was he led across the trail, than he corroborated the testimony of the first.

Then all was excitement, with the Little Sergeant the busiest man on the ground.

The delay had given all of the stragglers time to catch up and get fairly rested, and Major Pollard set forward again with full ranks.

But loss of sleep and protracted irritation had driven him almost frantic, and he now goaded his men on at such a pace that several began to fall behind again before they reached old-man Saunders's hut.

"Night work on top o' day work, an' day work on top o' night work!" growled a jaded soldier.

But Major Pollard had but one thought: "I'll never let another storm come between us!"

So it was in the dead of the night that his hounds led him up to old-man Saunders's door.

The house was dark, and everything still, as if the inmates had been abed and asleep since sunset. Only a sheep dog greeted the intruders with vociferous barking.

The Little Sergeant hailed the house lustily, and to such good purpose that soon a window opened, and a voice called back:

"Who be you, an' what do ye want, makin' sich a row about hyar at this time o' night?"

It was old-man Saunders, and he appeared to be in no amiable mood at having his rest disturbed.

Major Pollard rode forward, and spoke for himself.

"We are following a couple of runaways. A lady has been abducted—"

His prideled him to put it in this way, but when he had got so far, he felt the absurdity of trying to disguise the true situation, and broke off angrily.

"Have any such persons been this way?" was his conclusion.

"No, thar hain't!" asseverated old-man Saunders, stoutly.

"Abducted!" he added to himself. "You bet thar wa'n't no abductin' about that thar!"

"Excuse me," retorted the major, "but our hounds have led us directly to your door."

"That don't make no manner o' difference," insisted the old man. "We hain't got nothin' what you want in hyar, so you'd better be movin' on."

"I'm sorry to inconvenience you, but I shall have to stand for a little more satisfactory evidence than that against the direct testimony of my dogs."

"What's that you say?"

"To put it in unmistakable English, I shall have to search your house."

"Search my house! I guess not, mister."

"This can't be your day for guessing, or you are a very poor guesser, for I shall certainly do it."

"Whar's your warrant?"

"I have several of them here. The broad moonlight will enable you to count them, if you are a trifle better at counting than at guessing."

"I ain't puttin' myself out countin' sich scalawags as them. But who be you, anyway? I reckon you ain't ashamed o' yer name, though you'd orter be."

"Major Pollard, in command at Camp Seaton!"

"Waal, Major Pollard, in command at Camp Seaton, all I've got to say about you is, that Uncle Sam has got a mighty dirty representative in you, an' ef you've got it in ye to stand man to man, I'll bet you even money you don't set foot acrost this hyar threshold."

"Will you open the door, or shall we break it

down?" demanded the major, waiving the challenge of the sturdy old fellow.

"Ef you've got the decency to leave my ole woman time to dress—"

But there came an interruption quite unexpected.

The barrel of a gun was thrust through the window, and a white night-cap, fairly dancing with agitation, stood out against the black background of the dark room just over the old man's shoulder.

"I don't want no time fur to dress, fur no sich blaggard as that thar!" cried the voice of Mrs. Saunders, pitched to a decidedly bellicose key. "Thar's three of us in hyar—me an' my ole man an' the Kid—an' ef ary three o' you wants to try us on, now's yer chance!"

"Hold on, ole woman!" interposed her husband, taking the gun away from her. "We ain't was'tin' no wind on that thar crowd. They're boun' to come in, an' in they'll come, fur all us."

Thereupon he threw open the door, and Major Pollard entered without further ceremony.

While the old man was fumbling about for some means to make a light, the major struck a match and illuminated the room by holding it above his head.

It discovered the old man in scant habiliments, while the Kid sat up in the bed usually sacred to his sister, rubbing his eyes in a very good imitation of one recently roused from sleep—the curtain being nowhere in sight.

Mrs. Saunders stood her ground like a veritable Amazon. Of course, conventionality aside, her cap and gown were quite as modest attire as that affected by fashionable society.

A glance showed that there was no place in the house for any one to be hidden in. The rafters were overhead, and the four leg walls around.

"I beg your pardon for intruding upon you like this," began the major, in apology.

But the old man interrupted him brusquely.

"No you don't! All I want o' you is to git shet o' you as soon as you've got enough. An' ef I ever meet you even-handed, I'll show you what it is to be an American citizen."

"I would gladly pay you, if you can give me any information—"

"Will you cl'ar out?"

There was nothing to be made of this situation and the major made his exit with some loss of dignity.

Mrs. Saunders kept grumbling in a way that added nothing to his self-satisfaction, and the door was slammed to by her so closely behind him as to narrowly escape catching his coat-tails.

The window had already been shut; hence the pursuers had the field to themselves.

"Let the hounds go!" ordered the major.

They led the way to where a very shabby little nag found poor shelter from the blizzards under a shelving rock hedged about by a sort of brush lean-to.

There were traces of the recent presence of other animals, and after a brief examination Forrest declared:

"They have been here within twenty-four hours at the outside. They must have passed last night here, or, possibly, some portion of the day."

"We are gaining upon them!" cried Major Pollard. "Set the dogs forward."

They returned to the house, and then led off toward the northeast.

"He is doubling upon his course!" cried the major, exultantly. "He hoped to give us a fine chase to the westward! It will be an agreeable surprise when he finds us still after him."

"How would it do to set a watch on that house?" asked Forrest, when they had left old-man Saunders's hut some distance behind.

"What for?" asked the major.

"I don't know," was the hesitating reply.

"That crusty old fellow has been bought up by the runaway, that's plain. But then, of course, that is no reason why they should hold any further communication with him. It may be only a whim, after all."

"As long as we are on the track of the fugitives, that's all we want," said the major.

"We are on the track of the horses. We haven't seen their riders yet," answered Forrest, who was a born detective.

"That seems to me like a refinement of caution," replied the major. "But I am glad that you spoke of it, and I will leave nothing undone. How would it do to leave a man to watch the house? And if we get sight of the fugitives in the morning, we can signal him to come on."

This plan was carried out.

It might have been a lucky hit, but that old-man Saunders knew a thing or two.

The moment Major Pollard was out of the house, it became a scene of stirring activity—if that can be called a scene where nothing can be seen.

The Kid threw himself into his clothes with an agility that would have astonished the major, who had seen him a moment before rubbing his eyes with apparent drowsiness.

The pursuers had scarcely turned away, and were certainly not out of hearing, when he dropped out of the window on the opposite side of the house, and stealthily crept after them.

He saw the soldier who returned to watch the house, and chuckling with satisfaction, he crept away to the sheepfold.

In the stillness of the night Amy had heard the noise made by the soldiers, even in her retreat. She had lain trembling and shivering with dread, until the sounds died out, and all was deathly still again.

Had her brother been diverted from her trail? Was she safe? The suspense was becoming truly terrible, so that she could scarcely refrain from making some appeal to Kid, who she supposed lay at the mouth of the cave, when she heard a commotion among the sheep, caused by some one stealing into the cave.

She was so terrified by this, that she was on the point of leaping from her place and trying to escape, when a guarded whisper reached her strained ear.

"All right, miss," it said. "Don't ye be afeard. It's only me—Kid."

"Ob, Kid!" she replied, "come here and let me take hold of you. I have been so frightened."

He went to her, and she did seize hold of him, so warmly as to fill him with mingled delight and embarrassment.

He assured her that the danger was now really past, but that it would be prudent for her to remain where she was for a while yet, probably till daylight.

Her fears thus allayed, her weakness manifested itself again, and before she was aware she fell asleep.

The watching soldier saw nothing in the morning but the old man and his son going out to their sheep as usual, while Mrs. Saunders busied herself about her household duties, before following them.

Two columns of smoke announced that Major Pollard and his party had caught sight of the fugitives, and, yawning and cursing the folly of this enterprise, he took his departure.

Then Amy was brought back to the house, and placed once more in comfort, with a jug of hot water at her feet, and a bowl of Mrs. Saunders's famous "yarb" decoction internally.

This last was a bitter dose, and, like most things earthly, was probably good in proportion as it was disagreeable.

CHAPTER XIV.

A CHESTNUT BURR.

It was a part of Hannah's plan that Major Pollard should see her, but at such a distance that, even with the aid of his field-glass, he could not distinguish her from his sister.

Assured that he was following the two in whom alone he had any interest, he would care nothing further about the lone hut where they had stopped for a brief rest.

It was not long after dawn when the ever-vigilant Forrest espied her and Andy across a wide valley, and when he had recognized his sister's riding-habit, her face being veiled, Major Pollard ordered the smokes to be sent up to recall the soldier left behind.

Assured that they had been discovered, Hannah now called upon the speed of their horses, and the fugitives soon increased the distance between them and their pursuers, till they were far out of sight.

Major Pollard was not discouraged by this, though he indulged in some gentlemanly profanity on the subject, within his own perturbed breast.

"The fact that they rested long enough for us to make up the two days lost through the storm, shows that she has been worn out by this continuous flight," he argued. "She cannot endure it much longer. It is amazing to me how she has stood it so well."

Then he thought over the different possible methods of getting square with Sandy Andy for all this.

While he was indulging in that sort of amusement, Sandy Andy and Hannah were pressing

forward, till, just at the dawn of the third day, Andy was surprised to learn that their destination was Old Weasel-top's dug-out.

"You'll soon see what it all means," said Hannah. "I've crowded the mourners a bit, so's we'd git hyar before the ole scalawag turned out on his rounds."

She thereupon hailed the house in a voice that spoke well for her soundness of lung, at least.

The old fellow was up, pottering about his breakfast, but it soon appeared that he was in a decidedly ill humor.

"Who be you, an' what do'e want?" he demanded, merely poking his nose out of the door.

"Waal, you ole humbug! you got out o' the wrong side o' the bed this mornin', didn't you?" cried Hannah, roughly.

"Eh! eh! who be that?" poking his head further out, and peering under his hand at the elegantly-dressed lady who spoke with such a voice.

"I'll show ye who it is!" answered Hannah, tossing back her veil.

"Oh, be careful!" interposed Sandy Andy, in dismay. "Are you betraying everything to him? They will be here with the hounds before night, and will—"

"Git nothin' at all out o' him," concluded Hannah. "He's as sound as a dollar, ef he is such an' ole wretch."

"Be that you, Hanner Saunders?" cried Old Weasel-top, staring in astonishment.

"Yes, it is! Ain't you glad to see me?"

"No, I hain't! An' I reckon your ma never brung you up fur to go galavantin' around in that thar kind o' rig, though they do say as fine feathers make fine birds. Waal, all I got to say is, women folks brung trouble into the world, an' they've been up to mischief most o' the time ever sence."

"An' you're sich a low-down specimen, you ole reprobate, I reckon it's to git square that you let out them boun's o' yourn to sodgers an' sich mean truck, fur to hunt a lady hither an' yon all over these hyar mountings."

"Houn's? Who says houn's? I hain't lent the pups fur to hunt no ladies—no, I hain't!" whined the old fellow, growing more and more petulant.

"Yes, you have!" insisted Hannah. "You know you hain't sot eyes on them man-eaters o' yourn—an' it ain't your fault ef they ain't turned woman-eaters by this time—fur a week past, an' all the while they've been chasin' a pore distressed lady from pillar to post, as never done you nor nobody else no harm! You ole wretch! I never was so ashamed o' anythin' in all my born days as I be of you!"

"I lent the pups fur to hunt road-agints," pleaded the old fellow, fretfully. "I did so! An' the more fool me fur a-doin' of it. Ef I ever see them back, I'll make 'em chaw up the humbugin' sodger what wheedled 'em out o' me. I will—yes, I will! I swar it, by Jube! I swar it on a stack o' good books as high as a mounting! I do, by Jube! Durn sodgers, sez I! Durn 'em! durn 'em! They're a pesky lot!—woss'n women folks, e'na'most!"

"Road-agints!" scoffed Hannah. "Waal, they hev played you fur a fool! That's men folks, that is! Now you hark to me, an' don't you disremember what I say! Them thar sodgers, enough of 'em to clean out a hull tribe of pison Injuns, is all after one pore leetle creeter as it 'ud make yer heart ache to see. I'm in her clo'se now, an' they're all after me, 'lowin' as it's her. Now, ef you don't call them dogs off when they come hyar, as they will by sundown, you'll never sleep no more o' nights, in this world or the next—an' you byear me, Hanner Saunders, as is a-lettin' of it on to ye!"

"Be they comin' back with them thar pups?" cried Old Weasel-top, excitedly.

"They be, fur a fact."

"Waal! waal! waal! waal!" almost shouted the old man, lifting his hands in as much ecstasy as if he were "happy" at camp-meeting. "I was jest 'lowin' to set out after 'em this blessed mornin'! I was so! I'm hungry an' thirsty arter them thar pups! I'm cold an' I'm wet, my bones ache an' my jints is swellin', all fur them pups! An' they're a-comin' back, good Lord! Waal! waal! waal! waal!"

"Jest keep it in mind as it's a woman as has brung 'em back to ye," suggested Hannah. "It 'ud 'a' been a spell before you'd 'a' seen 'em ag'in, if you ever did, if I hadn't took the notion to lead them scalawags around hyar."

"Hanner you're a good gal, you be, by Jube! I allers said so, I did! An' ef you ever want them pups fur to chaw up ary feller you like—"

"Thank you!" interrupted Hannah, disdainfully, yet with a certain shame-faced accession of color, probably in view of some "feller" of

her acquaintance, or of her dreams—"but I don't like no feller, an' I hain't got none that I want to have chewed up, not by your pups, nor by nobody else's!"

"Waal, ef I git 'em back, that's all I want. An' I'll do you a good turn one o' these days, Hanner."

"Yes, if you don't furgit to!" replied Miss Hannah, with an incredulous curl of her lip. "An' for fear you will furgit it, I reckon I'd better take it now, while it's fresh in your mind."

"What do ye want out o' me?" asked the old fellow, with an air of sudden suspicion.

"Not enough to break you," replied Hannah, shortly.

"I'm poorer'n Job's turkey. I be so! The Lord knows, though, ef that thar sodjer's a-comin' back hyar with the new man he let on about, you're welcome to all ye kin eat. It mought as well go down your maw as his'n!"

"I ain't wantin' nothin' to put in my maw. I reckon we have enough to eat to hum, an' when I'm on the tramp, I kin pick up what'll do me, easy."

"What be you wantin', then?"

"Mits fur these hyar hosses. An' I'm bound to have good ones, mind!"

The old man sighed dismally, as if the favor Hannah had done him was promising to cost him dear.

"I've got some blankets," he ventured, dubiously. "It's e'ena'most a shame to sp'ile 'em."

"We won't sp'ile 'em, then. Keep yer rags!"

"Oh, these hyar is almost new."

"I know what looks like new to you. Buffaler skin is good enough fur me."

"Buffaler-skin!" cried the old hunter, throwing up his hands in dismay.

"Yes, buffaler, you ole skinflint!"

The old fellow dropped his hands and his head, and shaking the latter in gloomy resignation as it hung on his breast, entered his dug-out.

"What a grumpy old churl!" exclaimed Sandy Andy.

"Eh?" ejaculated Hannah, looking round.

Then she fell to laughing.

"You don't know him," she said. "He'll fetch us the best piece o' buffaler he's got, an' more'n we want, at that."

"Then, why do you blackguard him so?"

"Oh, that's his way. If you're mealy-mouthed he hain't no use fur ye; but if you fall into his lead, and give him as good as he sends, you'll git along with him twice as well."

Sandy Andy looked rather surprised. The whole interview had taken him so aback that he had looked on without attempting to take any part in it.

Old Weasel-top reappeared, bringing some pieces of buffalo-skin, the matted hair on which would make a horse's feet, wrapped in them, like puff-balls.

"How'll these hyar do?" he asked, as if giving them grudgingly.

"I reckon they'll pass," answered Hannah, receiving them without looking at them.

"They're as good as most o' the things one gits out o' you, I shouldn't wonder."

And gathering up her reins, she set her horse again in motion, without any more ceremonious adieu than this.

"Let me express my appreciation of your kindness," said Sandy Andy, who could not bring himself to accept such a service in so ungracious a way. "And if you will take the hounds off our trail, I shall feel indebted to you all my life."

"An' who mought you be, mister?" demanded Old Weasel-top, turning upon him and staring as if he had not observed him before.

Sandy Andy hesitated, at a loss what reply to make to such a challenge. So the old fellow answered his own question, with a sly twinkle in the corner of his eye.

"Oho! I reckon that thar road-agint stood in about your size an' make o' shoe-leather! Oh, yas! oh, yas!"

"Why, blast your eyes!" shouted Andy, suddenly rectifying his mistake, "do you call me a road-agent?"

And he whipped out his revolver in most warlike style.

That set Old Weasel-top to chuckling.

"Waal, 'e do speak up powerful peart! Road-agint or no road-agint, that ain't nuther hyar nor thar. Ye've run off wi' a female woman, have 'e? Waal, I leave 'e to her tender mercies!"

And chuckling the old hunter entered his dug-out, and shut the door.

Hannah laughed when Andy overtook her.

"He's an ole chestnut outside, and inside too," she said.

"And he will not fail about the hounds?"

"Leave him alone fur that. He'll fix the drum-major, make no mistake!"

CHAPTER XV.

A "STAND-OFF."

DURING the absence of his hounds everything had gone wrong with Old Weasel-top. Hunting or trapping, he had no luck. He even lost faith in his beaver "medicine."

Every day he had expected their return, and every night had brought disappointment, till he was in all truth and soberness out of humor.

Now, at the prospect of their coming, he was almost childish in his delight. He laughed to himself, and slapped his thighs. He apostrophized the dogs, as if they were with him. He provided a "square meal" of the tid-bits he knew they liked best. For, in spite of Jim Forrest's disparagement, no hounds ever fared better than old Weasel-top's.

A score of times he set out to follow back the trail along which he expected them to come, so impatient was he to catch the first possible glimpse of them. Yet as often he returned, fearing that they might come from some other direction, and pass on, not finding him at home.

So anxious did he grow as the day waned, that he was a good two miles back over the trail when he espied them, running with their noses high, and followed by Major Pollard and not more than half a dozen of his party.

The Hon. Charles was there. Upon symptoms of lagging in his horse, he had exchanged with his valet.

But Terry was determined not to be left behind. By alternately riding and running at the side of his horse, he managed to keep up.

The Little Sergeant would have felt himself disgraced forever, if he had failed to keep abreast with his commander.

Forrest, of course, made one of the party, having the hounds in charge.

Besides these, only two soldiers had been equal to the demands of their leader's impatience.

But to all these Old Weasel-top gave not a thought. The hounds, his pets, "filled his eye."

"The beauties! Ah! my children! Look at Sweet-lips! Thar! thar! how my Lady gives tongue! They're a-p'intin' fur home, an' they know it! Hark to 'em! jest hark! They're a-callin' of me! Good Lord! ef this hyar ain't heaven, what is? What is, I say? By Jube, I'm in glory! Whoop!"

Far from being the yell of delight that welled up into his throat, it was only a guarded mimic shout. But he leaped into the air and struck his heels together, and went through other, the most absurd, manifestations of ecstasy.

However, it was not characteristic of him to let any one see this exhibition of feeling. Instead, when he feasted his eyes on his pups till he could do so no longer without risk of discovery, he turned about, and ran for his dug-out, covering the ground at such a round pace that the mounted pursuers did not gain upon him.

When they rode up, there was no sign of him anywhere.

But the dogs had none of this eccentric reserve. No sooner were they in sight of the hut, than they became ungovernable. All of Major Pollard's party could not have held them.

With a perfect scream of excitement, they tugged at the leash, and when Forrest strove to restrain them, they turned upon him so fiercely, though they did not bite him, that he was glad to be rid of them.

Then away! like two brown streaks! with short, sharp yelps, that were almost like human cries. With head, body and tail in such a straight line that they looked as if they had been stretched out to an inordinate length, and legs flying back and forth so rapidly that they became invisible, they swept over the ground like projectiles.

The instinct of the trailer was swallowed up in the affection of the dog for his master. The quarry they had been following so long and so faithfully was forgotten. They were making straight for the door behind which was all that appealed strongest to their canine hearts.

How they assaulted it! It seemed as if they burst it in. But it was opened from the other side, to admit them, and instantly closed again.

If that meeting could have been seen! To the eye of one who did not know them, it would have looked as if Old Weasel-top was being torn to pieces.

The three stanch friends were rolling over and over on the floor, indistinguishable.

Old Weasel-top was certainly hugging and possibly kissing his pets, laughing and maybe crying a little, while they, filling the hut with the clamor of their greetings, seized him everywhere and anywhere in their terrible jaws, yet so tenderly that not a scratch was left on him by fangs that, in anger, could have rent him limb from limb in an instant!

This confusion did not cease when Major Pollard rode up and shouted to the tenant of the dug-out, nor when, having proved the futility of this appeal, he rapped on the door with the butt of his revolver. They had their romp out, the dignity of their would-be guest notwithstanding.

Just as the hubbub finally ceased, Major Pollard looked in through the one window, a square opening, closed when it stormed with a shutter, and saw Old Weasel-top sitting on the floor, with his back against the wall, a dog in the embrace of either arm, having his face affectionately licked by both, with such energy that it was plain they were vying with each other.

"Waugh!" ejaculated the hunter, indignant at this intrusion.

Like a flash My Lady tore herself from his side, and leaped at a single bound through the window.

The major had just time to rein his horse sharply to one side, as she shot by, her fangs fairly grazing his leg.

She would doubtless have leaped upon him like a panther, but that Old Weasel-top appeared at the opening just in time to block the passage of Sweet-lips, and cry:

"Drap it!"

Instantly the furious hound crouched, submissive.

Old Weasel-top whistled, and at a bound, as before, she returned as she had made her exit.

Every one of the party on the outside stared in mute dismay. The peril came and was averted so quickly, that it all occurred during the suspension of a breath.

Startled into a pallor which he would have been ashamed of had the occasion of it been different, Major Pollard involuntarily drew away from the dug-out.

Old Weasel-top opened the door and stepped out upon the door-stone, the hounds issuing and taking their stand on either side of him.

"Waal," he demanded brusquely, "what do you want?"

"These are your hounds, are they not?" replied the major.

"You better believe they be, mister!" was the positive assurance.

"They have been of incalculable service to us so far, and I hope to show my appreciation by such payment as you—"

But the interruption came short and sharp:

"Oh! You're one o' the payin' kind, be ye?"

Forrest here interposed, knowing how fatally his commander was blundering.

"If the chance ever comes to do you a good turn, Major Pollard feels that it is only fair that you should let him be the man to do it."

"H'm!" responded Old Weasel-top, turning his contracted eyes upon the speaker. "Have you brung the new man with ye?"

This was a better sign, but fortune was against "all hands of them" that day.

"Well, no, I can't say that I have," answered Forrest reluctantly, wishing in the bottom of his heart that he could put forward a man who would redeem the reputation he had given the hypothetical trencherman. "But we will all fail to and show you what we can do at a pinch."

"I might 'a' furgive 'e, if 'e had brung a walkin' starvation along wi' ye, like 'e said!" declared Old Weasel-top, looking at Forrest not unkindly. "Waal, I don't bear 'e no malice. I've got the pups back. Yas, I have! yas, I have!"

His delight would not be hid. It vibrated in his voice, and sparkled in his half-shut eyes.

But Major Pollard was in no humor to sympathize with anything of this kind. Indeed he was so preoccupied with the thought of being close upon the fugitives, that he did not stop to try to understand Forrest's interposition.

Snubbing his subordinate by cold disregard, he took the matter again into his own hands.

"Pardon me, but we are pressed for time. Unexpectedly, the trail we were following has led directly to your door. Has a lady in a gray riding—"

"I don't know nothin' about no trails," interrupted Old Weasel-top. "But ef you've been

follerin' my pups, it's accordin' to natur' as they should fetch you right hyar, an' nowhar else. They've come home—an' that's whar their heads is level."

"We shall have to be indebted to you a little longer for their—"

"I reckon you won't owe me nothin', mister—not that way. They've come home to stay, ye understand."

"But we cannot spare them yet. We are on the very eve of success. We cannot be more than a few hours behind those we have been striving to overtake for so many days."

"Waal, if you're 'lowin' to pick 'em up, the sooner you take the trail, the nigher you'll be to 'em all the time. That don't cost ye nothin', an' ye needn't stop for perliteness' sake along o' me."

"But of course we cannot follow the trail successfully without the dogs. We have conclusively proved that."

"That's your misfortune, then."

"Do you mean to say that you will not give us the hounds?"

A slumberous fire began to glow in Major Pollard's eyes. He was not used to this kind of opposition.

"Oh, I'm agreeable," answered Old Weasel-top, with a careless shrug. "Take 'em—if you kin!"

Major Pollard looked steadily at the old hunter, then glanced at the dogs, and lastly turned to Forrest.

"If there is no objection," he said, "let us be going."

"It would be impossible to induce the hounds to follow us, not to say lead us, without a sign from their owner," said Forrest, looking not a little nonplused.

"Try them!" ordered the major firmly.

Forrest made an honest effort, but the dogs only looked at him as if they had never seen him before, and had not the slightest notion as to what he wanted.

"If money will tempt you," began the major, white to his lips with suppressed rage.

"Money!" repeated Old Weasel-top, contemptuously, and disdained to proceed further in his repudiation.

"Then," said Major Pollard, "I command you to do whatever is necessary to put those dogs once more at our disposal! The situation is too serious for trifling. Do you hear?"

Old Weasel-top had stared at the speaker with wondering curiosity.

He now turned to Forrest and asked, quietly:

"Is he often took that way?"

With a smothered oath, Major Pollard flung his hand round to the butt of his revolver.

But Old Weasel-top's eyes had returned to his face, and there was something in the cool satirical smile with which he regarded this movement, not a muscle save those of his face disturbed, which was like a wet blanket to the heat of the major's resentment.

The hounds, without a sound, crouched low!

Hastily, Jim Forrest interposed, in a ringing, authoritative tone.

"None of that, major, or you are a dead man!"

Then, his voice suddenly dropping to a respectful appeal, as he let fall the hand he had extended, he went on:

"It is as a man, even more than your subordinate, that I warn you that nothing on earth could save you from the consequences of such an act, nor could anything be gained by it."

"But must we tamely submit to this outrageous whim?" cried the major, at white heat.

"I know of no remedy," replied the other, coldly. "A murder would not make the dogs any more available than now."

Major Pollard took that in and digested it, during a pause, in which, if an effort of his will could have annihilated every one there present, the witnesses of his humiliation, he would probably have exerted it.

Then, reining his horse sharply away, he asked, hoarsely:

"Where is the trail?"

They had no difficulty in seeing where it led away from Old Weasel-top's door, and they set out upon it.

The old hunter looked after them, chuckling softly to himself.

Suddenly, as his eye rested, not ill-pleased, on Forrest's retreating figure, he called after him:

"Fetch the new man along next trip."

Whatever his secret satisfaction at this evidence of favor, Forrest did not respond, or even glance back.

The trail soon ran upon stony ground, and

where a flat rock sloped off into the rippling waters of a stream it was lost, never to be regained.

Just at this point a slender rod was thrust into the ground, and in its split end was inserted a scrap of paper, bearing the word:

"GOOD-BY!"

CHAPTER XVI. TWO PICTURES.

In a solitary glen, with the pine-spiked peaks towering heavenward on every side, four men stand at the angles of an imaginary square, the diagonals of which are twelve paces in length.

Major Pollard has his arm extended over one of these diagonals, level with the shoulder, and a puff of white smoke hides from his piercing glance, as cold as steel, what is taking place at the other end of the line.

There the Hon. Charles Caxton, with one hand clutching a recently exploded revolver, and the other tearing at his breast, while his face is distorted with a grimace of horror and agony, is falling forward.

"Ah!" aspirates the Little Sergeant from his place, "it was beautifully done!"

Terry Flynn, with countenance unmoved, is advancing, promptly, yet without precipitation, toward his stricken master.

Her face warm with the flush of returning health, and radiant with recovered happiness, Amy Pollard sits in the rudest of all easy chairs, made of the pieces of an old packing-box roughly nailed together.

At her feet kneels Sandy Andy, with his arms about her, looking up into her face with a worshipful gladness that banishes all shadows of painful recollections from her heart.

With both hands on his knees, old-man Saunders has thrown his head back in a mimic shout of joyous laughter—only the grimace, his mouth wide open, but no sound issuing forth.

The Kid is shifting his weight from one foot to the other, and to cover his sheepish embarrassment, snuffles, and wipes his nose on his sleeve.

Mrs. Saunders is openly tearful with kindly sympathy, but "Hanner" has thrown her apron over her head.

THE END.

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